

Mediated Masculinities:
The Forms of Masculinity in American Genre Film, 1990-1999

by

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- ABSTRACT -

This dissertation mobilizes Brinkema's radical formalism (2014) through Deleuze and Spinoza to read masculinities as forms. Specifically, I closely read Western films and masculine crisis films from 1990 to 1999 to map how cinematic forms constitute the potential to alter normative modes of masculinity. To launch this endeavor, I rely on a theoretical hybrid of Brinkema-Deleuze-Spinoza that foregrounds genre films as vibrant forms of difference. This foregrounding unfolds through an engagement with Altman's theory of film genre (1999), Neale's work on genre films (2000), and Grant's view of film genres as iconography and ideology (2007) as well as the work of Deleuze (2012) and Herzog (2010 and 2012) to re-conceptualize film genre in relation to form. I proceed to use my theoretical hybrid and attention to forms to interrogate film theory as a means of seizing gender and, moreover, masculinities from discourses of representation and spectatorship, which tend to limit readings of gender and masculinities to socio-cultural and political meanings. This interrogation engages Mulvey's revision of screen theory (1975), Rodowick's work on difference (1991, 1994), Perkins's approach to *mise-en-scène* (1972), Bordwell's neo-formalism and post-theory (1996, 2005, 2006), Sobchack's phenomenological approach to spectatorship and affect (1992, 2004), and del Río's Deleuzian conceptualization of affect and performance (2008). Then, with an insistence on the close reading of cinematic forms, my dissertation undertakes two case studies: the Western and the masculine crisis film cycles of the 1990s. Considering the work of Gates (2006) and Grant (2011) on masculinities in popular cinema, my close readings reveal masculinities as taking shape, assuming structures, and forming as they affect and are affected by relations and becomings. These close readings of cinematic forms generate theoretical speculation that engages masculinities studies research, including Bly (1990), Connell (1995), Kimmel (2006 and 2013), Reeser (2010), and Buchbinder

(2013). Through theoretical speculation, my dissertation conceptualizes masculinities as forces of creation that materialize as forms. What is at stake in this dissertation is a methodology that denies transcendent ideals and essentialist claims of masculinity with concepts that harness the potential to continuously read masculinities as what has yet to come.

KEYWORDS: Film philosophy, radical formalism, masculinities, film genre, American cinema

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- INTRODUCTION -

Mediated Masculinities

Is masculinity always mediated? The concept of masculinity is often associated with and thought through ideals, characteristics, oppositions, representations, and definitions. In this sense, any identification of masculinity is always mediated by a preexisting idea of what masculinity is, but, unlike other concepts that are static, masculinity remains a contested concept in flux. While there are essentialist and normative definitions that claim masculinity is biologically linked to men's bodies and identities, continental philosophy and gender theory have challenged and undermined these claims (i.e., Halberstam 1998, Butler 1999, and Connell 2005). Nevertheless, and contrary to what some might think, masculinity is not easily conceptualized because there is no stable and fixed understanding of what it is in any given historical moment, as masculinities studies demonstrates (i.e., Brod 1987, Brod and Kauffman 1994, Gardiner 2002, Whitehead 2002, Connell 2005, Edwards 2006, Kimmel 2006, Reeser 2010, and Buchbinder 2013). Accepting that masculinity has no timeless or universal definition, the plural formulation – masculinities – is embraced widely within gender studies and other interdisciplinary contexts as an acknowledgment of the diverse possibilities that materialize as masculinity as a result of any given perspective that mediates what masculinity might be.

The intersection of gender theory and cinema studies is one such interdisciplinary context where masculinities have been examined and discussed. Gender became a significant mode of inquiry within cinema studies in the wake of feminist theory during the 1960s and 1970s with Claire Johnston's "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" and Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" launching important polemics that altered conversations within film theory (Kaplan 2000). Feminist film theory continues to contest and reimagine the dynamics of

gender within all areas of cinema studies by confronting the representations of women in film, examining how films generate notions of gender, critiquing the function of the cinematic apparatus as a tool of patriarchal ideology, and mapping new possibilities for feminist expression (i.e., Haskell 1974, Mellen 1974, Kuhn 1982, de Lauretis 1984, 1987, and 1994, Doanne 1987 and 1991, Gledhill 1987, Modleski 1988 and 1991, Penley 1988, Silverman 1988, Williams 1989, Mayne 1990, Clover 1992, hooks 1992, Cook and Dodd 1993, Creed 1993, Grant 1996, Thornham 1999, Kaplan 2000, and Mulvey 2009 and 2013). Feminist film theory also sparked the study of masculinities within cinema studies. Through a range of methodologies and theoretical approaches, the discourse of gender and cinema explores the diverse ways that films mediate a socio-cultural understanding of masculinities (i.e., Mellen 1977, Krutnik 1991, Silverman 1992, Cohan and Hark 1993, Lehman 1993 and 2001, Tasker 1993, Jeffords 1994, Studlar 1996, Cohan 1997, Pomerance 2001, Holmlund 2002, Bruzzi 2005 and 2013, Chopra-Gant 2006, Gates 2006, Eberwein 2007, Cornell 2009, Greven 2009 and 2016, Rehling 2009, Grant 2011, Kord and Krimmer 2011, Alberti 2013, and Shary 2013). I want to acknowledge that my work is indebted to all of these scholars and others because their important contributions helped shape the field and build approaches that provided key insights. Nevertheless, in this dissertation I critique many of these scholars in order to distinguish my own position within the fields my interdisciplinary research interrogates. Furthermore, these critiques are less concerned with refuting the important work that scholars have contributed to the fields and more concerned with opening up a new approach with the capacity to seize the creative potential of the powers of cinema.

My dissertation research benefits from the groundwork done by scholars within the fields of gender studies and cinema studies. However, my approach also deviates from previous work

on masculinities in a crucial way. Where prior works that analyze masculinities in film offer interpretations of how the representations of masculine characters reflect the socio-cultural views and issues surrounding gender within a given historical moment, I seek to map how the power of cinema – following the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and other theories of immanence – generates sensations that can be harnessed to unfold alternative conceptualizations of masculinities. In other words, I seek to uncover how reading for form as the taking shape of film form and content (what I refer to as cinematic form) can generate a thinking and creating in connection with the theoretical ideas brought into any given reading of a particular film. This involves an important shift within cinema and masculinities studies by arguing that closely reading the formal dimensions of cinema – following the film philosophy of Eugenie Brinkema – can generate speculation with the capacity to theorize new tools that augment existing views within gender theory and cinema studies by thinking masculinities as forms, as creative force, and as dynamic processes. This mode of reading entails paying attention to the film form – the formal components of an image, including mise-en-scène and editing – as well as the narrative structures and contents of a film. At times, my discussion of form involves the analysis of elements within a moving image (including narrative elements), but I also focus on form as a dynamic process that takes shape through reading the configurations of formal and narrative elements in order to speculate about alternative conceptualizations of masculinities. Therefore, in my dissertation I offer a theoretical exploration of masculinities that formulates new perspectives that generate the potential to alter and reimagine what masculinities can do.

This methodology situates my dissertation within the emerging field of film philosophy, which embraces the capacities of cinema to unfold new thinking. This is unabashedly theoretical despite the tendencies to move away from philosophical approaches in cinema studies, especially

in the wake of the post-theory movement and an insistence on historical work. There are vibrant flashes launched by film philosophy emerging within cinema studies, which both excites me and motivates the creation of this project. Therefore, while this dissertation explores masculinities studies, feminist film theory, masculinities in film, continental philosophy, and genre film, it approaches these discourses through an interdisciplinary methodology that is firmly rooted within film philosophy that situates my project among recent contributions to the field (i.e., Flaxman 2000, Rodowick 2007, 2014, and 2015, del Río 2008 and 2016, Colman 2009, Price 2011 and 2017, Sinnerbrink 2011 and 2016, Hadjioannou 2012, Brown 2013, and Brinkema 2014). Through the new field of film philosophy, cinema is viewed as having the capacity for sustaining philosophical inquiries and deliberations, which is established by the contemporary work of figures such as Stanley Cavell (1971 and 1981) and Gilles Deleuze (2005b and 2005c) with roots going back to the early work of figures such as Béla Balázs (1970 and 2010), André Bazin (2005a and 2005b), Sergei Eisenstein (1975 and 1977), Siegfried Kracauer (1997), Hugo Münsterberg (2002), and Dziga Vertov (1984).

Despite the hostilities towards film theory launched by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (1996), film philosophy – or film-philosophy as it is termed by the British cinema journal *Film-Philosophy* – is reaffirming the connections between cinema and continental philosophy. Brian Price, for example, asserts the position of film philosophy within cinema studies in a discussion of Carroll's claim that, in a Lacanian reading of a Herzog film, Herzog is the theorist, not Lacan. "It does not matter who got there first – Jacques Lacan, Werner Herzog, or the theorist in question. Rather," argues Price, "continental philosophers, Lacan included, regularly engage with art as parallel philosophical texts; the art is of interest precisely because it *is* philosophical" (2008, 39). My dissertation seizes the potentials that emerge when cinema is understood as a

philosophical art that generates conditions fostering new thinking. This occurs through the percepts and affects of cinematic forms that launch forces to be conceptualized by philosophical engagement (Deleuze 2005b and 2005c). In my dissertation, I turn to genre films as vital sites for thinking cinematically and philosophically about masculinities. Specifically, I closely read for the forms of masculinities in the Western films and masculine crisis films of the 1990s against established masculinities studies discourses and theories of affect to conceptualize how masculinities are mediated, but mediated by dynamic relations that are continuously becoming. This method embraces Price's claim that "to have a theory is to speculate at once about what we *can* and what we *cannot* see, about the relay between the two" (ibid. 41) because I interrogate existing notions of masculinities through cinematic form and theories of affect to illuminate the unseen conditions sustaining these notions. Although genre films are routinely interpreted as offering stereotypical or one-dimensional characters that can be read as representations of ideological functions, by contemplating the way cinematic form affects and is affected by masculinities, my film analysis offers theories that breakdown essentialist and routine understanding of masculine subjectivities within representations that can be read as re-enforcing precisely these understandings – I develop this further in Chapter One.

Genre films are routinely interpreted as offering stereotypical or one-dimensional characters that can be read as representations of ideological functions. However, by contemplating the way cinematic form affects and is affected by masculinities, my film analysis offers theoretical views that break down essentialist and routine understandings of masculine subjectivities within representations that can be read as reinforcing precisely these understandings through oppositional logic. To think about the relations between masculinities, masculinity, and masculine bodies against notions of mythopoetic masculinity, the myths of the

self-made man, and a masculine crisis discourse in the 1990s, I turn to genre films because they are often discussed by both cinema studies and masculinities studies scholars. Specifically, in the work of Michael Kimmel and R. W. Connell – two major figures in masculinities studies – the Western film genre is often discussed as a fantasy that produces ideals of masculinities. For example, Connell argues that the work of "James Fenimore Cooper and the Wild West show of Buffalo Bill Cody were early steps in a course that led eventually to the Western as a film genre and its self-conscious cult of inarticulate masculine heroism" (2005, 194). I am invigorated by the potentiality here for interdisciplinary thinking that bridges the claims of these two related discourses. This is also a main reason I chose to focus on the Western film genre in addition to the masculine crisis film because there is so much discussion of it in masculinities studies work. In addition, for cinema studies the Western film is generally regarded as a masculine genre, which illuminates the relations between film genre and gender (Tasker 2017).

However, my approach foregoes efforts to reinscribe the meaning of genre films back into established modes of spectatorship theory as well as socio-cultural analysis. I embrace Price's claim that "to deny theory its validity simply because it strays from the concrete is to renounce our efforts not only to understand the world in more complex terms but to limit ourselves to the task of simply describing what appears, or has appeared before" (ibid. 42). Therefore, by closely and theoretically reading the Western films and the masculine crisis films of the 1990s, I map new potentialities for challenging toxic modes of masculinity that endure within our socio-cultural milieu despite the best efforts of many to renounce them. This is not a rejection of the important sociological and anthropological work underway in the field of masculinities studies; rather, this is a return to theory that seeks to complement this ongoing work by generating new tools and concepts that can be generatively put to work. Consequently, I

embrace Price's other claim that "to return to theory is to make a return to not only having an idea about the world, but also offering suggestions about how that world might in fact be changed" (ibid. 42). Moreover, it is a glimpse of the potentiality for the world to be reimagined. To launch this theoretical expedition, I rely on Eugenie Brinkema's recent work on theories of affect and forms to sustain the creation of concepts through a film philosophy that is intensely focused on reading how film form and content take shape as forms. Brinkema's radical formalism is a vibrant contribution to cinema studies that gives life to this project because she maps a methodology that reunites the analysis of film with continental philosophy.

Radical formalism – which I discuss in great detail in Chapter Two – offers an approach to forms that differs from established definitions within cinema studies. Brinkema's work is situated in relation to a more extensive lineage of rethinking formalism in critical and literary theory, which is taken up in the work of Eyers (2017), Levine (2015), Rooney (2000 and 2017), and Salvato (2016). However, my dissertation focuses exclusively on Brinkema's contribution to the rethinking of formalism because her work is the only text that is extensively focused on cinema studies and film philosophy. Specifically, Brinkema's approach to forms and cinema challenges and demolishes the binary that divides film content and form, which she terms "an antiquated division" (2012, 5). Following a radical formalism, my dissertation closely reads cinematic form for what takes shape through the many relations of a film as it unfolds. Moving beyond the antiquated division of form and content – through Brinkema's film philosophy – I read film content as film form and film form as film content, which exposes the fractures that exist within a binaristic logic that restricts the power of cinema and the forces arising from close reading. In this sense, the elements of film form and film content are read as entering into relations that take shape as forms, which I then use to launch a speculative rethinking of

masculinities. My concern does not align with traditional philosophical approaches to aesthetics – this is not in any way an analysis of visual pleasure or images of the beautiful – and instead my definition of forms (and not film form) is that which can be read through the structuring of each film as a dynamic process of relations between elements of film form and content in any given context. For Brinkema, "form is not determined or determinable in advance, is not paraphrasable or summarizable, essential or given, is not immediately perceptible. Rather, that form must each time be read for" (2014, 21). This is the methodology I embrace throughout my dissertation as I closely read for the forms of Westerns and masculine crisis films from the 1990s, which opens up a speculative force that can think masculinities anew. Going forward, when I am discussing forms (and not cinematic form) within my dissertation it should be understood that I am using the definition of forms as mapped above. However, there is also a tension between forms and film form that arises throughout my discussion as well as the methodological approach of reading for forms because there is always a constant movement between the two. To closely read film form (and content as cinematic form in terms of structure) as elements taking shape as forms involves a continuous back and forth that is itself a generative force that informs my speculation. My analysis dwells within that tension as a means of foregrounding the unfolding thinking and creating rather than merely offering what has already been thought.

Brinkema's radical formalism also pushes analysis away from an interpretation built on the experiences of spectators and back to a sustained reading of forms. A self-described "de-contribution to spectatorship studies," Brinkema's work looks to the forms of affects as opposed to the effects of affect on a viewer (ibid. 36). "First and foremost," she states, "this approach requires beginning with the premise that affective force works over form, that forms are auto-affectively charged, and that affects take shape in the details of specific visual forms and

temporal structures" (ibid. 37). This position is a challenge to Deleuzian cinematic theories of affect – as I detail in Chapters One and Two – which causes an important shift that alters the paradigms that position cinematic affect as elusive and ambiguous, which plunges us into the potentialities of closely reading for affects as intensities that shape forms. However, as stated above, Brinkema's conception of form is not a neo-formalism – such as that of Bordwell and others from the post-theory movement. Instead, her most basic definition of forms is that which is not paraphrasable. "Reading for form," Brinkema states, "involves a slow, deep attention both to the usual suspects of close analysis that are so often ignored or reduced to paraphrase in recent work on affect – montage, camera movement, *mise-en-scène*, color, sound – and to more ephemeral problematics such as duration, rhythm, absences, elisions, ruptures, gaps, and points of contradiction (ideological, aesthetic, structural, and formal)" (ibid.). Therefore, reading for form involves careful attention to film form and film content in order to determine how the relations of these elements take shape. While I discuss my augmentations of Brinkema's theory in Chapter Two, her work is a vibrant inspiration to think anew about forms, affects, and masculinities.

In a straightforward sense, this dissertation is an exploration of the means through which forms mediate masculinities. The mediating of masculinities I explore is not necessarily something that occurs for us as cognitive or feeling spectators – although I am sure this happens too – rather, reading for form through my approach unveils masculinities as a site that takes shape through the forces and intensities of relations, which affect and are affected by the masculinities in a film. One of my goals is to use forms to think about new potentialities for masculinities against a popular discourse that claims a crisis of masculinity in the 1990s. In relation to masculinities studies, this project is aligned with the continuous movement to undo

man and masculinity as a universal by contributing to a de-centering effort that seeks to dismantle patriarchal hierarchy and push towards socio-cultural and political equality. While masculinities studies and cinema studies overlap in their considerations of films, Tim Edwards points to a lack of communication between the two distinct, but related, modes of scholarship. When highlighting masculinities research in what he refers to as the third wave of masculinities studies, Edwards states, "most of the aforementioned more culturalist, literary or media-driven analyses of masculinity seem oblivious to the enormous legacy of studies of masculinity that preceded them" (2006, 3). There are exceptions within cinema studies as well as other disciplines where the legacy of masculinities studies generated by the work of Michael Kimmel, R. W. Connell, Harry Brod, Michael Messner, Michael Kauffman, and others is acknowledged. For example, Philippa Gates's (2006) *Detecting Men: Masculinity and the Detective Film* cites and uses research that includes the work of Brod, Connell, Edwards, and Kimmel in order to formulate her examination of masculinities in the detective genre. Nonetheless, Gates' exceptional research represents an anomaly rather than the trend. Therefore, this dissertation contributes to the ongoing collapse of this divide by using masculinities studies work from both the foundations of sociological research as well as gender and film research to interrogate and further our thinking about masculinities within cinema studies and beyond. While I focus on masculinities within this dissertation, closely reading for form could take shape through a multiplicity of diverse perspectives, including a focus on theories of race and class as well as an interrogation of philosophical concepts (such as truth and pain). There is, however, no space for me to discuss these important topics within this dissertation.

Building a theory through the work of Brinkema, Deleuze, and Spinoza is an important component of this work because it allows for a pathway through the psychoanalytic approaches

that tend to dominate work within cinema studies on gender. Edwards identifies an issue because of "the dependency of many media studies of masculinity on psychoanalytic theory. That is itself often contentious and potentially at odds with many of the wider and more culturalist claims made" (ibid. 128). While I discuss these claims in Chapter One and Two, it is important to outline how psychoanalytic and other early theories of masculinity sought biological and essentialist definitions, which are later challenged by theories that come to understand gender as socio-culturally constructed. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, I use masculinities to designate these ongoing and continuous processes of gendered subjectivities that do not originate from an essentialist or normative definition and do not have some possible ideal mode of completion. Conversely, I use masculinity primarily to designate a dominant mode of masculinity – such as Kimmel's notion of the self-made man or toxic masculinity – that can also be understood as hegemonic (this is a contentious term in and of itself so I will hold off discussing it until Chapter One). In addition, when I am discussing masculinity in relation to patriarchy then I am discussing a mode of masculinity that supports and is supported by a system of patriarchal privilege. At times, however, I use masculinity to indicate the image or ideal or subjectivity of a body in a given moment or event. Therefore, when I am using the singular (masculinity) in a discussion of forms of masculinities then I am referring to a specific and particular instance of this forming that takes shape in a given context of a film.

Before proceeding further, it is important to note that my dissertation focuses on films that concentrate on white masculinities. While there are possibilities for discussions of race – and an important basis for doing so in relation to the Western, especially – my analysis calls attention to the problematic structures of masculinity that take shape through white male bodies. This is not to deny the importance of critiques of race or analyses of the issues that arise from the

oppression of racialized subjectivities. Instead, my focus on masculinities and white male bodies aims to contribute to a dismantling of patriarchal privilege and entitlement so often condensed at intersections of whiteness and masculinity (Kimmel 2013). Furthermore, there is already established scholarship that examines issues of race in cinema generally and in genre films specifically in a far more substantial manner than would be possible in my dissertation. In particular, the analysis of Indigenous peoples in the Western film genre has produced critiques of Westerns throughout film history, including American cinema in the 1990s (i.e., Bird 1998, Rollins and O'Connor 1998, Kilpatrick 1999, Prats 2002, Buscombe 2006, and Wood 2008). Additionally, the literature that discusses Black subjectivities in American cinema is diverse and continues to develop important analysis and critiques of periods throughout film history. In terms of Black masculinities and American cinema in the 1990s, there is an established discussion that interrogates the Black action films from this period as well as other representations of Blackness in Hollywood and independent films (i.e., Diawara 1993, hooks 1996, Willis 1997, Watkins 1998, Fisher 2006, and Boylorn 2017).

This dissertation also embraces – in relation to Deleuze and Spinoza – a theoretical allegiance with emerging work in the field of posthumanism. My dissertation does not set out to trace what is already posthuman about our experiences of cinema, but rather, to implicitly embrace a collapse of the boundaries between cinema and life as generating thinking and creating. In this sense, my dissertation does not view posthumanism as the latest theoretical trend that promises to break all ties with the past in an attempt to start anew. On the contrary, I see posthumanism as an alteration of theoretical approaches as such that develops as we move away from anthropocentric methodologies informed by Humanism. Rosi Braidotti outlines this position in her key work, *The Posthuman*, which maps the forces and projects being generated by

the posthuman condition. For Braidotti, "Far from being the nth variation in a sequence of prefixes that may appear both endless and somehow arbitrary, the posthuman condition introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet" (Braidotti, 2013, 1-2). The notion of posthumanism as a qualitative shift is an important theoretical position within my dissertation and motivates some of the specific discussion in the chapters to come.

In the chapters that follow, I proceed through the establishment of my film philosophy analysis in the following fashion. Chapter One offers a critique of oppositional logic through theories of affect and philosophies of immanence, which I link back to Brinkema's challenge posed to concepts of cinematic affect and Deleuzian film studies. Through this challenge as well as the philosophies of Deleuze and Spinoza, I map theoretical pathways that open up alternatives to a reading of oppositions. By foregrounding the formal dimension of films (as the elements of both content and form) and readings that eschew binaristic logic, I demonstrate that genre films are sites of vibrant intensities where forms can be closely read for. This claim affirms that the formal dimension of genre films has the capacity to launch theoretical speculation, which differs from approaches that examine socio-cultural, personal, or categorical meanings. In the final section of the chapter, I map how masculinities are conditioned by affective relations and how this taking shape unfolds forms through close reading. Chapter Two further consolidates my theoretical foundation by interrogating binaristic logic and approaches that interpret the representations of gender. This interrogation takes place through a return to the work of Laura Mulvey to argue that form and content are vibrant intensities that unfold difference, which relies on Deleuze's concept of difference in itself. Through my theoretical discussion of Mulvey and

other important film theorists, I expose as fallacious the notion that films are fixed and static texts. Following my critique of representation and binaristic logic, I undertake an extensive discussion of Brinkema's radical formalism to map how my film philosophy reads masculinities as forms. Chapters Three and Four proceed to analyze the forms of masculinities in the Western and then in the masculine crisis film. Each chapter – from one to four – opens with a close reading for forms in films with established discourses on masculinities, which provides me with the opportunity to distinguish my approach against interpretations that rely on gender as a representation. Each chapter allows me to show that even in films from genres considered to contain stereotypical and problematic representations of masculinities, a film philosophy methodology that embraces a radical formalism can open up a force of speculation with the capacity to rethink masculinities by generating new concepts and tools that challenge current understanding and approaches to analyzing masculinities.

- CHAPTER ONE -

What Makes a Man? What Makes a Genre? What Makes an Affect?

In *The Big Lebowski* (Coen Brothers 1998), during the set-up, Brandt leads the Dude, Jeffrey Lebowski, into the west wing where the Big Lebowski has been in seclusion all day because he is apparently upset that his wife Bunny has been kidnapped. Reflecting on the triumphs of his life during this moment of apparent sadness, the Big Lebowski asks the Dude, "What makes a man, Mr. Lebowski?" At first, this inquiry seems rather straightforward. After all, we define the category man within North American society and culture. Furthermore, many people refer to themselves or to others as men; they consider certain pursuits to be manly – especially, contact sports and shooting guns; our North American department stores usually contain sections where a man can buy clothes made specifically for men; public spaces typically have a designated washroom for men (although this is currently under reform); and, we have products for men – from shampoo to razors to deodorant – catered to the supposed hygiene requirements of a man. However, upon further consideration the question is rather difficult to answer, at least for the Big Lebowski. He speculates that perhaps it is being prepared to do the right thing whatever the cost. The Dude, after initially responding, "I don't know," eventually agrees with the Big Lebowski's speculation that this imperative – to be prepared to do the right thing – does indeed make a man. But after a brief pause for reflection, the Dude adds an additional requirement: "and a pair of testicles."

This scene in *The Big Lebowski* strikes me as echoing Rick Altman's opening of "A semantic/syntactic approach to film genre" in which he begins by asking: "What is a genre?" (1999, 216). Much like the speculation in regards to the definition of a man, Altman – as other

genre studies scholars have done before and after – stresses the problematic practice of defining what a genre is (Altman 1999, Neale 2000, Grant 2007 & 2012). Altman's text proceeds to conceptualize two approaches to defining a film genre: a semantic and a syntactic approach.¹ Altman tells us that semantic definitions of genre "depend on a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, set, and the like," while syntactic definitions of genre "play up instead certain constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable place-holders" (ibid. 219). For Altman, "The semantic approach thus stresses the genre's building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged" (ibid. 219). It may be said that the Dude and the Big Lebowski are discussing the definition of a man by using terminology similar to the language used by Altman to define genre film. The Dude's answer, "a pair of testicles," can be read as demonstrating a semantic element associated with the definition of a man, while the Big Lebowski's speculation, "always doing what is right," can be read as demonstrating a syntactic element associated with the definition of a man. Film genre theory and criticism has framed these approaches with various terminologies, such as Buscombe's discussion of inner and outer form, and Grant's delineation of ideology and iconography (Grant, 2007). However, no matter the terminology or criteria used to establish the definition of a film genre or a man, there is always already a film or a subjectivity that unsettles the model and exposes the failure of any predetermined set that defines it. As the Big Lebowski states, only moments after offering his initial definition of a man: "strong men also cry." This addition complicates the definition he previously offered by introducing a new characteristic to his definition of a man. Therefore, we might speculate that any attempt to conclusively define masculinity, as well as a film genre, is bound to fail precisely because there is never a

¹ It is important to note that Altman does alter his original approach by adding a pragmatic approach in 1999 within a chapter of *Film/Genre*. However, my discussion is primarily concerned here with the original theory as outlined in

completion to a man or a film genre, nor is there ever a static set of characteristics encapsulated by a finite definition.

An alternative approach is to consider film genres as ongoing processes, as Neale states in *Genre and Hollywood*. Neale acknowledges the strengths of Altman's approach and its connections with other theories of genre. "What is valuable about it as an hypothesis," states Neale, "is that it is premised on the importance of history, on the recognition of heterogeneity, and on the possibility of difference, variation, and change" (2000, 204). Furthermore, Neale recognizes that Altman's position aligns with theories that understand genres to be "best conceived of as processes" (ibid.), a view also supported by Grant (2007, 34). In a similar approach to masculinities, Grant (2011) and Philippa Gates (2006) argue that masculinities should be considered as ongoing negotiation or continuous fluctuation. These approaches to film genre and masculinities move beyond static or fixed definitions and, in their place, think of film genres and masculinities as dynamic processes that always have the capacity for becoming other than what they are as they influence and are influenced through their relations.² Moreover, this methodology captures the creativity and vitality that sparks any formation of a definition as well as any subsequent attempts to apply or use a definition. Consequently, approaches to film genre and masculinities are less important in terms of right or wrong – is a definition correct or incorrect – and more important in terms of what they do – generating thoughts, responses, challenges, augmentations, expansions, and even new ideas about the focus in question. From this perspective, definitions are less definition and more a process that undergoes continuous

² While it may be reasoned that it is impossible to define any specific term, concept, or identity, this has not stopped many theories and philosophical schools from attempting such an endeavor. My position would be to avoid rigid definitions and the pursuit of complete models of anything because I embrace alternative philosophies (philosophies of immanence) as I will outline momentarily. However, I also concede that from some theoretical perspectives definitions can be useful and that some things lend themselves to definition more readily than others. Specifically, I approach film genres and masculinities as two things that do not lend themselves to rigid or static definitions and this tendency of film genres and masculinities to escape definition launches the goal of this dissertation.

transformations. The reason we can speculate about a definition of masculinity is precisely because it can never be static or fixed.

The form of *The Big Lebowski* illuminates the vibrancy of genre films and masculinities, which overflows any attempt to offer a conclusive definition. The film plays with generic conventions and styles with intertextual connections to film noir – especially, *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston 1941), *Murder, My Sweet* (Dmytryk 1944), and *Spellbound* (Hitchcock 1945). Also, the film draws on the Western with the inclusion of the Stranger (Sam Elliot), who narrates in a style that treats the film as if it takes place in the Old West. Then there is the bowling league that the Dude and his friends play in, which, at times, is pushed to the background amidst the kidnapping plotline. However, the bowling league playoffs plot recalls the familiar trope in sports movies where an underdog team of misfits challenges a formidable foe – even if we never see the semi-final take place in the film. Furthermore, Walter's constant references to the Vietnam War and his struggles to readjust within society evoke the home front subgenre of the war film. The combination of these generic conventions, among others, reveals the generic hybridity of *The Big Lebowski*, which points to the difficult task that would ensue if trying to place this film within a preexisting generic category. It is a task that may be completely baffling if the goal is a conclusive definition. However, this difficulty would not preclude any attempt to classify the film within a generic category (or categories), or the development of a theory or concept that attempts to explain how the film plays with genre. Rather, this difficulty elucidates the necessity of definitions, concepts, and theories for the existence of film genres, which emerge through dynamic processes of creation by outlining the parameters or conditions of any genre within its contexts. This process of creation composes principles and models that are then adapted as new films, interpretations, or augmentations of generic conventions, which enter into

relations with these established definitions, concepts, and theories. In short, film genres are not found, they are formed. As Alanna Thain recently argued, Linda Williams's work on body genres "makes films and bodies productive" (2017, 13). This view of film genre captures the capacity of genre films to move bodies, create thoughts, inspire new ideas, augment perspectives, and materialize what has yet to come. My dissertation seizes this capacity of genre films, which can be neglected in favor of what genre films represent or mean in relation to predetermined personal, categorical, socio-cultural, or political frameworks. Through this seizing, I endeavor to use the power of cinema to conceptualize new tools for rethinking masculinities in relation to previously established discourses in masculinities studies.

The film form and content of *The Big Lebowski* illuminates that masculinities, like film genres, are abstract, theoretical, conceptual, notional, and even philosophical because they develop through material and cerebral encounters that form any idea of what masculinity is. A masculinity – or a mode of masculinity – is something that also requires definitions, concepts, and theories that only ever endure as one idea among many others. As Michael Kimmel states, "I view masculinity as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world" (1994, 120). Physical objects may be theorized by any given conceptualization of masculinity – such as a pair of testicles – but masculinities persist as dynamic processes composed by relations, expressed through relations, and altered with the emergence of new relations. Thus, when confronted with the task of defining masculinity – or what makes a man – there is the possibility of bewilderment if a mode of masculinity is understood as preexisting, as natural, as fundamental, or as objectively knowable. When confronted with previously unconsidered characteristics and scenarios that challenge how we apprehend masculinity, there is the potential for new relations to throw a preconceived

version into question or flux. As a result, a mode of masculinity takes on a new form. What does make a man? More appropriately, we should ask a different question: what forms do masculinities take? Because, what is a mode of masculinity if not a form, a structure, a shape, a configuration? However, masculinities do not simply hold steady and stand fast. Masculinities are always forming as ongoing processes of becoming. The form of *The Big Lebowski* as perplexing expresses the impact new relations have on any definition – or room – that was previously tied together by a particular set or feature – like a rug.

Beyond questions of masculinity, the narrative structure of the film functions through a series of scenarios that leave the Dude, his friends, and other acquaintances more and more perplexed through each event. Whether it is Jackie Treehorn's strongmen confronting the Dude at the beginning of the film, Donny walking into the middle of the Dude's story about his urine stained rug, or the Dude's meeting with the Big Lebowski about his rug that was peed on, each scene takes shape around situations of bewilderment and these scenes often conclude with a new point of reference that throws the previous relations into flux. Even the opening voiceover narration of the Stranger conditions this form. Specifically, near the end of his voiceover, after repeatedly stating, "sometimes there is a man," the Stranger laments, "lost my train of thought here." While it would be possible to trace these situations as representing new obstacles for the Dude to overcome in his pursuit of an overall goal, this tracing does not obscure the fact that these situations are formed through encounters that are perplexing. For example, "What's in the fucking carrier?" and "I'm sure there is a reason you brought your dirty undies" and "Does the female form make you uncomfortable, Mr. Lebowski?" can be understood as signifying moments of character development, complicating action, and foreshadowing, but they also mark situations that are shaped through characters becoming perplexed. Spectators may realize that is

not a Pomeranian in the carrier, anticipate that the ringer full of dirty undies is bound to trouble the exchange, or recognize that Maude does make the Dude uneasy suggesting sexual tension. However, these are responses to situations that are formed and not the reading of forms.

There is the difference between a response to content and form, and the close reading for forms. For example, we may encounter a chair and claim, "the chair looks comfortable." This is a response to the chair, even the form of the chair, but not a close reading of the forms of the chair. Conversely, we note that the size of the chair is more than capable of accompanying a human body and the upholstery is composed of a soft fabric with excessive stuffing that would provide physical ease for someone sitting on it. In addition, we detect that the chair possesses the ability to recline, which offers a potential occupant of the chair an opportunity for added relaxation. From this short, close reading, we can state that the form of the chair is comforting because the chair takes shape through a combination of elements that can generate physical ease. Nevertheless, someone may respond to the appearance of this same chair, which was said to look comfortable, "I dislike oversized, squishy chairs because I find them to be so uncomfortable." This demonstrates that a close reading of form does not guarantee a specific response, such as, in this hypothetical case, whether the chair is comfortable or uncomfortable. Instead, this speculative exercise of close reading for form focuses on the relations taking shape that can influence and even condition how we take something to have meaning. However, this close reading uses formal elements as a way to think, which always already persists before a response because the ability to have a response is predicated on form – in the very least some cognitive or bodily response to form. The form of the chair as comforting is not a solution to the binary of comfortable and uncomfortable, but rather an active theorizing of the configuration of something

– be it a chair or a moving image – beyond what it is merely recognized as being – in this scenario, a chair that is comfortable or not.

To return to the spectators of *The Big Lebowski*, responses to situations are not only examples of realizing, anticipating, and recognizing the cues and schema of a film, but also the modes of masculinity represented by the characters. We may recognize that, as J. M. Tyree and Ben Walters argue, *The Big Lebowski* discredits "traditional models of masculine authority" (2007, 68). This can be observed through the use of a binary construction that identifies traditional and non-traditional masculinity, which resembles a binary of masculinity and femininity. Tyree and Walters compare the Dude to the other male characters within the film in order to define the masculinity he represents and they arrive at the recognition that the Dude is not like other men in the film. "The Dude's openness," they argue, "suggests an ease not necessarily shared by the other male characters, who often indulge in conspicuously hyper-masculine posturing" (ibid. 75). Against Walter Sobchak's continuous references to his service in the Vietnam War and the Big Lebowski's "self-aggrandising" (ibid. 71), the Dude becomes defined by what he is not in an exercise of comparison. "The 'dude' type, then," state Tyree and Walters, "is established in firm counterpoint to that hard-headed, egotistical pursuer of capital and status, Reaganite man. Dudeness is a way of being a man that privileges sociability over industry and civility over self-furtherment" (ibid. 84). Through this procedure, masculinity becomes defined by opposite values and the dude type is constructed as representing a set of choices made from binary oppositions. In contrast, reading for forms is the method I turn to in this dissertation because it opens up pathways for thinking about the becoming of masculinities in terms of relations and processes that contextualize the potentiality for masculinities to take shape. Therefore, just as the form of the chair does not offer a binaristic model, *The Big*

Lebowski as a form of perplexing does not manufacture a solution through an oppositional logic – either the chair is comfortable or not, or the dude type is hypermasculine or not. Instead, reading the form as perplexing generates the capacity to think masculinities as conditioned by puzzling, by baffling, by bewildering encounters – non-binary formations.

Moving beyond binary oppositions can be a theoretically daunting task because film theory relies so heavily on them – especially when analyzing gender. Eugenie Brinkema maps this predisposition of film theory in *The Forms of the Affects* through a formal analysis of the tear in the scene following the murder of Marion Crane in *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960). "Film theory is thus ill equipped," argues Brinkema, "to theorize the tear that is not a tear or the tear placed under suspicion; hence the accounts of *Psycho* described earlier, which ascribe the tear to the oldest metaphysical binary in the West—a true tear; no, a false tear. Plato's choice" (2014, 21). Responses to the tear in *Psycho* are framed through the recognition that the tear is a real tear or not, which is the same strategy used to read the chair as comfortable or not, as well as the dude type as hypermasculine or not. "In such a strict oppositional logic," Brinkema states, "there is little room for the tear that is not legible as a tear but must be read in and for its ineluctably specific complexity. As in Nietzsche's critique in *Beyond Good and Evil* of the metaphysician's faith in binary values, we need to move beyond the false true tear–false tear choice" (ibid.). Turning to Nietzsche, whom Deleuze reads within the philosophical lineage of immanence, Brinkema establishes how oppositional logic conceals the context of any situation by forcing complexity to yield to pre-existing binaries – in this case, true or false. "Nietzsche's chosen word for this getting beyond," states Brinkema, "was *jenseits*, an opening up of perspectives, an introduction of the *außer*- or extra-, a reckoning with the potentiality provided by the thing that breaks down the binary by which it was formerly described" (ibid.). The opening up of

perspectives forces us to read for forms within their contexts (the relations of the elements of form and content) and for all of their intricate complexities. "This is the generative productivity of the tear," argues Brinkema, "that is not legible as a tear: it is not a passive brute mute bead but an opening, a possibility for reading for something beyond (or that resists, even that obscures) its own self-evidence" (ibid.). Brinkema's theoretical approach is the driving force behind my endeavor to read for the forms of masculinities, which necessitates leaving oppositional logic used to describe the representations of masculinity in film. Therefore, reading for the forms of masculinities aims to move beyond masculinity that is understood as masculinity or not by foregrounding the relations and contexts that eschew oppositional logic.

In order to launch a project that reads for the forms of masculinities, a challenge to move beyond the binaries of film theory becomes necessary. However, before such a challenge can materialize through an interrogation of the oppositional logic of film theory – and specifically theoretical models used to analyze gender – the foundation for this challenge requires a thorough mapping. Specifically, this chapter maps the theoretical pathways that open up alternatives to reading oppositions. To foreground this *jenseits*, to use Nietzsche's word, I follow Brinkema, Deleuze, and Spinoza in a turn to theories of affect that illuminate the forces and intensities that break down binary logic. Then I work to divulge the vibrancy of genre films as conditioning the potential to read for forms, which affirms the capacity of genre films to generate formal meaning in comparison to approaches that examine socio-cultural, personal, or categorical meanings. Finally, I turn to masculinities studies in order to elucidate masculinities as configured by affective relations that unfold forms through close reading. This is underpinned by the view that masculinities require corporeality sustained by material relations within an environment as much as it requires thinking – both work together. Consequently, reading for the forms of masculinities

demands increased attention to affects and relations, and genre films are vibrant structures where this reading can flourish.

Theories of Affect

The affective turn of the 1990s and 2000s introduced a theoretical discourse that attempts to account for the ways in which bodies are impacted by intensities and forces generated through relations. Theories of affect are diverse, drawing on phenomenological and poststructuralist philosophies, with a focus on how bodies, emotions, feelings, and our general lived experiences are altered, transformed, produced, and created by a range of energies that can only ever be sensed by us before materializing in concrete states. This theoretical discourse seeks to address these powers, forces, intensities, influences, and energies that are often imperceptible and only ever acknowledged after their effect is received. For example, while I am walking outside I hear a bird squawk and I turn my head quickly to the sky, but my eyes sting in pain as the sun's rays hit my eyes. This scenario offers the chance to identify several "intensities" or "forces" that arise from the relations between beings or bodies. At first, there is a noise made by a bird, which was prompted by some affect – perhaps it noticed a piece of food on the ground and the force of that food initiated its reaction. Next, the sound made by the bird had a certain intensity that struck my ears and which in turn instigated me to alter my bodily position in response. Finally, as I turned my head the intensity of the sunlight from a blinding sun struck my eyes and I then experienced this sun's rays as stinging. Prior to the breakdown of this series of events, one could easily categorize this series into a binary of cause and effect: sight of food – bird squawks; bird squawks – turning of my head; and, bright sunlight – my eyes hurting. However, mapping the intensities or forces that erupt in the middle of what is traced as cause and effect points to the

power of relations between things to create, produce, transform, and alter by emphasizing that processes do not follow linear and singular paths where one thing influences another resulting in a change. Instead, theories of affect generate a map of relations that seek to address a multiplicity of paths flowing through any event as an assemblage of complex, non-linear relations beyond a linear cause-effect relationship. Furthermore, we may speculate that our bodies and all bodies are always becoming different through the ways they affect and are affected by other bodies, as well as the ideas of these affections. This thinking does not limit bodies to a "human" body and instead recognizes all virtual and actual manifestations of material capable of affecting and being affected to be bodies, which includes discourses, ideas, images – and even film genres. To unpack these ideas, I will turn to a brief interlude in the history of philosophy.

Theories of affect are generated by a complex philosophical lineage that runs through the work of the French continental philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his collaborations with fellow French thinker Félix Guattari. Some theories of affect consider philosophers that influenced Deleuze and Guattari – such as Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson – while others limit their engagement to the work of Deleuze and Guattari alone. Cultural theorists such as Brian Massumi, Steven Shaviro, Lauren Berlant, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick are some major figures who have advanced theories of affect, but it is the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza who is the underlying influence that opens up the potentiality of affects. It was Spinoza's refusal to privilege mind or body as an alternative to René Descartes's mind over body dualism that inspired Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, which opens up a philosophical lineage that runs counter to the Western philosophical tradition of the mind-body split. This alternative runs through the work of Spinoza to Nietzsche and Bergson and then to Deleuze. While there are many versions of Spinoza's thought – from analytical to continental – it is Deleuze's reading of

Spinoza that generates this alternative lineage related to theories of affect (Norris, 2011, 5-6).

Though I acknowledge that Spinoza's philosophy is something of a magic spell that can stimulate a multiplicity of different readings, my reading of Spinoza is informed by Deleuze's interpretation. When I read Spinoza, I am always reading his philosophy through Deleuze, but not as a repetition of Deleuze's reading. Rather, I aim to undertake my own interpretations of Spinoza, especially the *Ethics*, with a creative approach similar to that of Deleuze.

As I have pointed out, what is generative for Deleuze in Spinoza is the alternative he offers to Descartes' mind-body dualism. For Spinoza, our mind does not think independently and the world does not exist simply for the mind that accounts for it. In his philosophy, Spinoza demonstrates how the mind and body are dependent on the existence and functioning of each other. This is specifically articulated in the *Ethics* where Spinoza states: "The idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our mind's power of thinking" (1996, 76). My mind can act only because of what occurs to my body through its relations with other bodies. However, in my reading of Spinoza, bodies are defined very broadly to include not only physical bodies but also mental bodies and assemblages that can be read as composing bodies. Therefore, discourses, thoughts, ideals, concepts, myths, and the like are all considered bodies. That is why Spinoza also claims that my body can increase or decrease its abilities as a result of the ideas my mind has. Anyone who has gone for a great walk or run and come home to write a great paragraph knows how the body can impact the mind. And, anyone who has struggled through a difficult loss and lazed around one's apartment in a lethargic manner for months knows how the mind can impact the body. This is why Spinoza claims, "He who has a body capable of a great many things has a mind whose greatest part is eternal," and, "He who has a body capable of doing a

great many things is least troubled by evil affects, that is, by affects contrary to our nature" (Spinoza, 1996, 178). All the capacities of minds and bodies are generated through their relations with other bodies and the affects of these relations. As a result, if we are seeking to increase, or aid, our body's power of acting as well as our mind's power of thinking, we are, in essence, seeking to prolong our existence and sustain relations that allow us to do so.

This is how Deleuze reads Spinoza to form a positive, or affirmative, concept of desire. In Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, desire does not develop from something a person lacks, such as in psychoanalytic theory; rather, it is a desire to continue existing which involves production, mutation, and creation in relation with other bodies. Life is considered to be creating, mutating, and producing in order to persist. As Spinoza states, "The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing" (1996, 75). This philosophy identifies striving to persevere as the essence of life and recognizes that affects are what spark the creating, mutating, and producing, which increases or diminishes a body's perseverance. For Spinoza, especially as read by Deleuze, "joy and sadness are passions by which each one's power, *or* striving to persevere in his being, is increased or diminished, aided or restrained. But by the striving to persevere in one's being, insofar as it is related to the mind and body together, we understand appetite and desire" (Spinoza, 1996, 101). Therefore, what constitutes a body's power are affects, joy, and sadness, that arise in the relations in-between various interactions, or assemblages, of bodies. For example, I am working but suddenly I am hungry, so I make some beans on the stove. Once they are hot, I eat the beans and I am no longer hungry, so I return to my work. This entire scenario is related to my desire, but this should not be understood as a desire that arises from a lack of food. Instead, through Spinoza and Deleuze we can recognize how this entire scenario is related to my desire to persevere. I am working to secure money that

will aid my ability to acquire provisions needed to sustain my life, such as beans. When I feel that I am hungry, it is an intensity received by my body that communicates with my mind, and with an interest to persevere I seek out food. There is a multiplicity of intensities that occur while I am heating the beans – from the stirring of the beans to the heat emanating from the element on the stove and the sources generating that electricity. Then, while eating the beans, my body enters into an assemblage with the bodies of the beans, and the spicy sauce and the warmth of the beans trigger a multiplicity of affects. Once I have eaten the beans, I no longer experience the intensity of hunger and I am able to return to work with adequate ideas, and no longer seeking to sustain my immediate perseverance through eating allows me to continue to work towards further assemblages and I strive to persevere. Thinking about hunger as an intensity provides me the opportunity to recognize the complex set of relations that make up this event as opposed to viewing hunger as a lack that is then filled by food. Even though this is a simplified example, it points to the complex relations that make up each moment, each event, in our daily striving to persevere and to how these relations contribute to our body's power.

Theories of affect, especially those informed primarily by Spinoza, open up new modes for thinking about the world because of the emphasis they place on relations and the forces generated by these relations, which allow bodies to persevere. It is important to make the distinction between philosophies of immanence (such as those of Spinoza and Deleuze) and philosophy, in the traditional Western practice, as informed by the negative and dialectics (such as Descartes, Hegel, and psychoanalysis). Spinoza, especially as read by Deleuze, stresses desire as affirmative, positive, and productive, which means that desire is not something that arises from repression or a lack but it is instead motivated by bodies, and moreover life, striving to persist and enhance itself: "Desire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be

determined, from any given affection of it, to do something...desire is appetite together with the consciousness of it. And appetite is the very essence of man, insofar as it is determined to do what promotes his preservation" (Spinoza, 1996, 104). There is a difference between these two philosophical lineages: the Western tradition composed of philosophers such as Descartes and Hegel versus alternative philosophies of immanence composed of philosophers such as Spinoza and Nietzsche. This is important for approaching theories of affect because the thinking that informs the methods of the affective turn can be read as counter-intuitive to the foundations of the vast majority of Western philosophy. It is precisely this established Western philosophy of metaphysics, binary logic, mind-body dualism, the subject, and transcendence that theories of affect, and moreover philosophies of immanence, attempt to work through and beyond – as Brinkema discusses above in relation to Nietzsche.

Deleuze was drawn to the philosophy of Spinoza and Nietzsche for specifically this ability to shock thought from the routines of the Western tradition, and it is why Deleuze, as well as Guattari, held the belief that Spinoza and Nietzsche are important thinkers of immanence. For theories of affect, Deleuze and Guattari view Spinoza as introducing new problems that require new concepts, which creatively respond to the experiences that these problems unfold. Within *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari highlight Spinoza's key question for theories of affect: "Spinoza asks: What can a body do?" (2004, 283). Spinoza maps out this question in the section on affect in his *Ethics* where he states, "For indeed, no one has yet determined what the body can do" (1996, 71). This is an important statement for Deleuze and Guattari as well as for theories of affect because "We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do" (2004, 284). Through this focus on what a body can do, they challenge the being of traditional ontology by focusing on action, dynamic movement, and the complex relations bodies can enter into.

However, Deleuze and Guattari offer us grounds for why this inquiry is so important for theories of affect: "in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body" (ibid.). There is a shift imposed by the force of this question about what bodies can do because we are asked to think about the relations between bodies and how one's power to think or act is not the sole ability of a subject but instead the collaboration of a multiplicity of affects. For Deleuze, pushing us to reconsider the relations between bodies is important in order to build his philosophical method of transcendental empiricism, which he maps from *Difference and Repetition* (2004) to *What is Philosophy?* (1994) with Guattari. This method launches a move beyond oppositional logic.

Transcendental empiricism appears to be a contradictory term. Traditional Western philosophical discourse likely would associate the transcendental with the transcendent, but Deleuze's philosophy and philosophies of immanence explicitly work to counter this association as a basis for understanding life and experience. The transcendent, as an outside truth or giver of meaning – such as God – that provides meaning to life and experience, is a model that is rejected by Deleuze and much of continental philosophy. However, Deleuze also opposes putting in the place of a transcendent meaning a model that centers on the subject, as the foundation of experience, which would view the subject, and moreover the mind, as that maker of experience – Descartes' "I think therefore I am." In place of a transcendent outside spirit, as the source of truth and meaning, and as an alternative to a subject-based center of experience, Deleuze proposes a radical alternative that takes experience itself to be the basis of all life and meaning. This is not the experience of a subject and that subject's ideas that account for experience; rather, this is the

experience that forms the subject as well as all other bodies. Therefore, while Deleuze is critical of the notion that a subject precedes experience, experience can give rise to formations or perceptions that are experienced as a position taken to be a subject. Creating such a radical philosophical method is surely a primary reason why Deleuze's theory is sometimes considered to be so complex because it challenges us to see experience as transcendental and it removes not only the transcendent (i.e. God) but also the subject from the center of that experience and its meaning. As Deleuzian theorist Claire Colebrook articulates, "*A transcendental empiricism...insists that there is no ground, subject or being who experiences, just experience*" (2002, 87). While the Western philosophical tradition might privilege the mind as that which produces experience, Deleuze's transcendental empiricism views experience as a flow of becoming where the mind, or the subject, is only conceived as one distinct being among a multiplicity of other beings, or bodies, that experience has formed.

Embracing theories of affect generates the potentiality for opening up new modes of inquiry by conceiving of experience as a force of difference that composes through ongoing relations rather than binaristic logic that produces static models. By proposing a theoretical methodology rooted in theories of affect, I take a crucial step towards alternative discourses for discussing gender and film genre. In particular, theories of affect shift attention from approaches focusing on cause and effect approaches and away from the subject as the grounds of experience to affective reading of relations between bodies. The forces and intensities of those relations reveal that it is experience that forms subjects – however tenuous they may be. While theories of affect have been put to use by film theory and cinema studies in various contexts, these works have tended to concentrate on the way cinematic affect impacts the spectator. As opposed to turning outward towards the spectator to examine how the subject experiences affect, my

approach follows Brinkema and turns inward to forms as a means to read masculinities as composed by relations. "There is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be," argue Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, (2010, 3); but, for rethinking masculinities as forms, I am drawn to methods that read the relations generated by affects as opposed to the experiencing of affective states. It is my contention, following Brinkema, that the formal dimension of cinema offers a powerful site to read affects that generate the relations that compose masculinities. In Deleuze's work on the time-image, he illuminates this capacity of moving images to function as an event independent of, or in spite of, a subject. "The screen itself is the cerebral membrane where immediate and direct confrontations take place," states Deleuze, "between the past and the future, the inside and the outside, at a distance impossible to determine, independent of any fixed point" (2005c, 121). Even though Deleuze is making this claim in relation to a specific type of image – the time-image as a distinct mode of cinema that emerges from the post-war European art cinema – it is possible to extrapolate this claim to a broader conceptualization to understand images and films as forming by experience that can be read for independently of any subjective experiencing as a fixed point.

Keeping in mind that affects are forces that increase or diminish our power to act, I argue it is possible to read affect by focusing on the way that affects materialize as and through forms. This is possible by considering Gregg and Seigworth's claim that "Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (2010, 1). In-between-ness, as used by Gregg and Seigworth, call our attention to relations. "Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation," state Gregg and Seigworth, "*as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities" (ibid.). This passage is what takes on a form that materializes and that can be read for. "That is, affect is found in those

intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise)," they continue, "in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves" (ibid.) Although we cannot see affects from our position as subjects because they are forces that impact our bodies, forms function as an exterior site of perception where we can observe affect as it creates, mutates, transforms, and alters.

Thus far, projects that examine cinema through theories of affect concentrate on the subject that is affected by and affects the cinematic image, but Brinkema's turn to forms opens up the capacity to read affect as it impacts images within the cinematic space. In her book *The Address of the Eye* (1992), film theorist Vivian Sobchack points toward this capacity, even though her work on affect and cinema concentrates on the spectator. "The moving picture, too," argues Sobchack, "perceives and expresses itself wildly and pervasively before it articulates its meanings more particularly and systematically as this or that kind of signification, that is, as a specific cinematic trope or figure, a specific set of generic configurations, a specific syntactical convention" (1992, 12). Therefore, if cinematic images are composed of bodies that perceive and express themselves, then they too have the capacity to act and be acted upon, which gives rise to forms. However, Sobchack is not interested in how this perceiving and expressing generates forms. On the contrary, she pushes us to consider the relations in-between the cinematic image and ourselves as spectators. "A film is given to us and taken up by us," states Sobchack, "as perception turned literally out and toward us as expression" (1992, 12). Although Sobchack's contributions are important for understanding how affect impacts our understanding of spectatorship – especially her later text titled *Carnal Knowledge* (2004) – I take a different approach and argue that theories of affect can also impact our reading for forms.

Furthermore, even if it is speculatively generative to reflect on the ways cinema affects and is affected by spectators, there is more that theories of affect can contribute to cinema studies, such as mapping the forms created by affects. As Brinkema has recently argued, "The affective turn in film and media studies has produced repeated versions of the reification of the passions: films *produce* something in the audience, or, sometimes, in the theorist, or, sometimes in the theorist alone" (2014, 31). This type of production recalls my discussion of *The Big Lebowski* because the interpretations of the film I reference concentrate on responses to film form and content rather than the reading for forms. "It is often *her* felt stirrings, *his* intense disgust," Brinkema argues, "that comprises the specific affective case study. These accounts, whatever their philosophical orientations, insist on the directional property theory of affect: that it is intentional, that it is effective" (ibid.). Again, it is the recognition, the anticipation, or the realization of some thing – here a sensed emotional state – that the spectator reads through theories of affect. "Affect is taken as always being, in the end," insists Brinkema, "*for us*. The theoretical consequence of this assumption is an approach to writing theory that emphasizes the personal experience of the theorist" (ibid.). Affect, as Brinkema contends, is not just *for us* because it generates forms within cinematic images. That is why, through Deleuze, cinematic images are another position in addition to the subject that is formed by experience. Therefore, masculinities as forms are not the experience of *something* or *someone*, but the forming of relations. Thus, in my dissertation I demonstrate how reading for forms indicates the relations in-between masculinities and other bodies, and their taking shape, within specific American genre films. Whether it is the way a masculine character is framed, the structure of the narrative, or events shot from a subjective point-of-view, reading for forms is the way in which all of these forces and intensities materialize.

If forms are where affects materialize, without reifying or becoming static, then forms can be read for affects. This methodology is developed by Brinkema's work on forms and affects, which pushes film theory beyond the effects of affect on the film theorist or a spectator. "The one way out for affect," she argues, "is via a way into its specificities. That approach will be called—unsurprisingly, for historically it was always the way to unlock potentialities—close reading" (2014, xv). Indeed, theorists working on cinematic affect, such as Sobchack and Shavero, have pushed the boundaries of cinema studies into creative interpretations that promote the feeling of images, but along the way the interpretation of the formal dimension of cinema has been neglected. As Brinkema points out, "The affective turn in film theory perhaps recovered the visceral, but only at the expense of reading" (2014, 30). Perhaps there is no better example of the recovering of the visceral at the expense of close reading than Sobchack's famous statement about watching the opening of Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) – (*figure 1.1*). In her book, *Carnal Thoughts*, Sobchack states, "Despite my 'almost blindness,' the 'unrecognizable blur,' and resistance of the image to my eyes, *my fingers knew what I was looking at*—and this *before* the objective reverse shot that followed to put those fingers in their proper place" (2004, 63). While one may argue this is a method of reading, Sobchack's analysis of this scene from *The Piano* is focused on the visceral response her body has to a cinematic image. By turning her attention to what her fingers knew, Sobchack denies the specificities of relations within the image in order to come to terms with and to process the affective potentiality of the image as an effect – the tingling of fingers. Alternatively, Brinkema's radical formalism pushes us beyond a discussion of affects where images are reduced to causes read through spectator responses as effects. In the next chapter, I interrogate works from the history of film theory with a focus on the analysis of gender and film form in order to move beyond the binary logic as well as the cause and effect

processes towards a theory that reads masculinities as forms. However, before I undertake this interrogation of film theory, it is necessary to establish how the formal dimensions of genre films (namely, the relations of the elements of film form and film content) are vibrant sites where the forms of affects and masculinities can be read for.



figure 1.1 – *The Piano* (Campion 1993)

Film Genre

There appears to be productive tensions between Deleuzian theories of affect and the study of film genre, despite Amy Herzog's acknowledgment that genre studies "seem incompatible with the concerns of Deleuze's film-philosophy project" (2012, 137). This realization of productive tensions is visible in recent cinema studies scholarship, including: Elena del Río's *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affect* (2008) and *The Grace of Destruction: A Vital Ethology of Extreme Cinemas* (2016), Amy Herzog's *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same* (2010), and Alanna Thain's *Bodies in Suspense: Time and Affect in Cinema* (2017). Much of this work is motivated by a "reimagining of what genre films do," and in these works, "genre theories are reactivated via forces or tendencies" (Thain, 2017, 13). While these

projects undertaking Deleuzian stimulations of genre theories are vibrant, they are inclined to focus on the responses of spectator's bodies and potentialities, which keeps affect relegated to the realm of effects that are had on a subject. However, there is also an insistence within this movement on film form. "Genre films foreground problematics of time and the body," argues Thain, "but a Deleuzian shift takes the emphasis off archival classifications and toward a diagrammatic mode of tendencies and potential" (ibid.). This de-emphasizing exercise of classification – does a film belong to a genre or not – in order to increase the emphasis on the formal composition of genre films is a move that opens up capacities for Deleuzian theories of affect to intersect with film genre. By placing this emphasis on film form, these Deleuzian encounters with film genre challenge the misconception within Deleuze studies that views genre films as incompatible with Deleuze's film philosophy – as Herzog outlines above. The incompatibility, in this instance, arises from a position that views genre films as repetitive productions that eschew difference, but Thain, Herzog, and del Río have successfully challenged this assumption. "Although genre films may seem to operate according to a logic of the same," argues Thain, "there is actually a motor of differential repetition underpinning their repetitive pleasures. Shifting toward genre as tendencies brings out this aspect of minor difference too often dismissed, taking seriously qualitative change" (ibid.). Nevertheless, within this argument against genre films as expressing a logic of the same, Thain's claim remains firmly entrenched in, to use Brinkema's words above, a reification of the passions.

What may begin with considerations of film form quickly becomes a discussion of how there is a potential in the formal dimension of film to impact the bodies and minds of viewers. This is evident in Thain, for instance, when suspense becomes reified as the process of self-transformation in Deleuzian continuous becoming. "In cinema, light is the suspensive medium

par excellence, argues Thain; "we doubly experience what is suspended and the *feeling of suspense* itself as emergent change. Cinematic suspense gives us the image of how we are in time, the consistency of the self becoming (an)other" (ibid. 11-12). While she notes the potential to read the formal dimension of the relations between light and suspense, Thain swiftly transfers this potentiality from film form and affects to the realm of cause and effects. As if paraphrasing Brinkema's very critique of theoretical engagements with cinematic affect, Thain emphasizes what cinematic suspense offers the viewer – what it gives *us*. Reading rapidly changes into responding as the vibrancy of reading for forms becomes restricted as yet another cause of the subject's experience concretized as an effect. However, what I do not wish to overlook is that Thain conceptualizes genre films as vibrant sites composed of elements of film form and content. That is to say, if a genre film – specifically, in her study, a suspense film – is the cause of an effervescence with the ability to have a profound effect on a viewer, then the formal dimension of genre films themselves must be sites full of energy and fervor rather than dull repetitions of the same. Otherwise, if a genre film were a repetitive production that could completely eschew difference, then there would be no forces of difference created by the film that cause a viewer to feel, stir, tingle, move, or transform.

This realization of genre films as vibrant sites for reading for forms motivates a primary question within Herzog's work on the musical moment in film, which approaches film genre through Deleuze's philosophy. "How is it that popular music and popular film," asks Herzog, "two media produced by heavily conglomerated commercial industries, defined by their formulaic structures and marred by culturally repressive modes of representation, are nevertheless experienced as forces that propel us elsewhere, outside ourselves?" (2010, 2). There is a tension within Herzog's question that resonates with the apparent incompatibility of

Deleuze's film philosophy and the study of film genres: popular films are consumerist products designed with limited creativity to function simply as entertainment rather than catalysts of transformation. Yet, as the work of both Herzog and Thain attest, genre films persist precisely as catalyst that spark the transformations of bodies, of thoughts, and even of socio-cultural views in spite of their apparent repetitive, commercial essence. Therefore, genre films not only give us feelings, responses, and thoughts through the creation of affective forces, they also must be composed of vibrant intensities in order to generate these forces.

My focus on genre films is sparked by this realization that they are composed of vibrant intensities that not only initiate forces that affect viewers, but also configure the potential to read for the forms of genre films themselves. Accordingly, the radiating of cinematic form experienced by viewers on their body and mind is only the residue of a far from depleted process ongoing within the moving images of genre films. While Thain, and other Deleuzian encounters with genre film, capture this radiating potentiality, their work also marks the vital, pulsating source of this emission: the formal dimension of cinema. "*Bodies in Suspense* reorients the generic association of suspense films within criminality," states Thain, "toward such an understanding of genre films as sites of tendencies opening onto new questions of what cinematic bodies can do. Here, 'suspense' films subject us to 'the crime of time' as the felt force of becoming" (2017, 12-13). Within Thain's discussion of what her book does, cinematic form can be read as illuminating the opening where these new questions emerge because genre films are approached as dynamic events rather than static images to be understood through associations. Therefore, Thain's readings develop as responses to the dynamics generated by genre films as events, which resonates with Herzog's assertion that genre films are dynamic events and not static texts (2010, 11). This position instigates a change of focus within the study

of genre films that moves from connecting the content of films to socio-cultural meanings – what we may deem a public realm that views film genres as reflecting and even challenging popular beliefs – to connecting the formal dimension of films to personal meanings – in comparison, a private realm that views genre films as vital sparks capable of transforming subjectivities. My dissertation pushes the reorientation initiated by Thain, Herzog, and del Río, among others, along a pathway carved by Brinkema into a cinematic realm that views genre films as vibrant sites for reading for forms that generate the conditions for meaning. Correspondingly, where Thain calls our attention to the felt forces that genre films expose viewers to, I work back one step further to interrogate the processes creating intensities, which then may be felt as forces on a body. However, prior to any feeling, reaction, or cognition, these same intensities materialize as forms. Through this methodology of reading for the forms of genre films, my focus is on the affective relations of a cinematic realm that structures masculinities as formal meanings, which is different than a socio-cultural realm that is used to examine what types of masculinities are present within a film, or a personal realm that is used to explore how expressions of masculinities within a film affect viewers.

Far from an arbitrary approach flung into service for a study of genre films, my approach maps support for approaching genre films as vibrant sites for reading for forms from within existing film genre theory. To consider film genres and genre films as vibrant sites, we need to move away from procedures of generic categorization and recognizing representations in order to treat them as dynamic events with the capacity to generate the yet unthought through speculation – I will focus on moving away from generic categorization in this section and developing a more substantial critique of representations in the next chapter in order to foreground my theoretical speculation that confronts masculinities and cinematic form. This consideration follows Herzog's

understanding of genre films as dynamic events rather than static texts, but this view is also supported, in part, by established film genre theory. "Genres are neither static nor fixed," argues Grant (2007, 34). This assessment of film genres as dynamic demonstrates that they resist finite definitions. "Apart from problems of definition and boundaries," states Grant, "genres are processes that are ongoing. They undergo change over time, each new film and cycle adding to the tradition and modifying it" (ibid. 34-35). An understanding of genres as dynamic processes rather than stable definitions, as Grant suggests, aligns well with theories of affect and the approaches of Herzog, Thain, and del Río, among others, which seek to explore processes of becoming as opposed to what a genre is. However, Grant's understanding of film genres as processes does not necessarily afford the same dynamic potentiality to individual genre films as vibrant sites of cinematic form, but instead highlights that there can be no complete, overarching definition of, for example, the Western or the war film, and it also points to the fact that new film genres can develop.

Through Grant's view, a study of film genre could debate if a particular film belongs to a genre or not given the particular, ongoing development of a genre's history while still considering the individual film or films to be themselves static and fixed – not that Grant is necessarily advocating for this approach, but his focus on film genre and not genre films leaves this possibility open. Therefore, even if film genre theory acknowledges that film genres are dynamic and in ongoing negotiations, as Celestino Deleyto points out, the majority of scholarship "is still centrally concerned with whether a film belongs to a genre or not" (2012, 220). Deleyto encourages scholars to rethink approaches to film genre that suppose genres to be static and fixed. "Against the more linear approach, according to which genres, like other categories, work in simple, predictable ways that can be investigated, known, classified, and

controlled," states Deleyto, "a chaotic view of genres underlines their instability, the impossibility of establishing clear lines of demarcation, and the nonlinerity, unpredictability, and complexity of their evolution" (2012, 222). While Deleyto's theoretical foundation is not tied to Deleuze's philosophy, his approach can support a view of genre films as vibrant sites of cinematic form because it notes characteristics of film genre that challenge repressive, binary logic. If film genres, following Deleyto, are characteristically unstable, not easily definable, nonlinear, unpredictable, and evolve in complex ways, then the films that compose any given account of a genre should also exhibit these qualities. However, despite the potential to read genre films for vibrancy, they are routinely evaluated in terms of categorization, as Deleyto points out, or in terms of socio-cultural significance, as Neale (2000) discusses.

These tendencies have lineages that germinate within early cinema studies scholarship, which laid the foundation for disregarding the formal dimension of genre films. "Partly, perhaps, because Hollywood's genres have so often been regarded as aesthetically impoverished," states Neale, "genre theory has frequently concerned itself instead with their socio-cultural significance" (2000, 220). Beyond a concern with categorization, genre films are also read for meanings, which often concretizes as statements of their socio-cultural significance. This type of reading does not fundamentally rule out reading genre films as vibrant sites of cinematic form, but the prevalence of reading for socio-cultural significance, as well as categorization, tends to dominate the work of film genre theory and criticism. "Basing their claims on the perceived ubiquity, longevity and popularity of genres and of 'genre films'," states Neale, "theorists of all kinds have consistently argued that genres are important socio-cultural phenomena and that they perform important socio-cultural functions" (ibid.). A link between genre films' apparent lack of aesthetic complexity and their popularity develops for film genre theory a discourse of low and

high art, which focuses on the socio-cultural significance of mass entertainment. "They insist unwaveringly on the ideology," argues Horkheimer and Adorno, referring to the masses, "by which they are enslaved. The pernicious love of the common people for the harm done to them outstrips even the cunning of the authorities" (2002, 106). This bourgeois critique of mass entertainment (Britton 2009, 471) is one common approach of film genre theory that argues genre films compel the masses to thoughtlessly submit to dominant ideologies. Conversely, scholars seeking to defend film genre against charges that they only support dominant ideologies often accepted the coordinates of the attack – genre films are aesthetically impoverished mass entertainment – in order to redeem a select number of directors as talented artists who were proficient enough to transcend the baseness of low art and enter into a pantheon of auteurs. For example, Robin Wood goes to great lengths to compare Howard Hawks to Shakespeare in order to validate his films as more than mass entertainment and argues for their socio-cultural significance (2006, xv-xvi). Therefore, whether film genre theory adopted critical or affirmative views of classical genre films, the basis for a discussion of film genre historically accepted the unproven assertion that took these films as aesthetically simple and poor.

Rather than interrogate the cinematic form of genre films, much of early (pre-1970s) film genre criticism assumes an analysis of socio-cultural significance as the primary approach, which develops into critical work on the function of genre films as myth. "Likening genre to myth provides clear gains for genre theorists. This strategy provides an organizing principle for genre study," argues Altman, "transmuting what might have been a hollow commercial formula into a culturally functional category, and thus lending the prestigious support of cultural anthropology to the heretofore lowly study of popular genres" (1999, 20). Approaching genre films as myth, as Altman outlines, counters the movement to dismiss film genre all together as mass entertainment

because it points to a substantial function of genre films – socio-cultural significance – in need of examination. However, this tendency to examine socio-cultural meanings prevents the exploration of the full range of film genre significance, which instills a lingering belief that the cinematic form of these films can only ever be tools in service of unearthing socio-cultural meanings. A problematic effect of this lingering belief is that, as Neale outlines, "those that wrote in praise of Hollywood's genres often found themselves as using the same epithets and concepts as those who did not" (2000, 208). For example, he finds little difference between the assessment of Schatz, who seeks to affirm genre film in *Hollywood Genres*, and the critiques of film genre by its detractors (ibid.). Furthermore, by examining genre films as myth, early film genre theory did little to counter the view that these films were devoid of aesthetic significance. Rather than taking a stance against the dismissal of Hollywood cinema as a whole, which would mean providing evidence of the aesthetic significance of genre films, scholars implicitly accepted the charge by seeking to legitimize their work through a focus on the socio-cultural relationship between genre films and audiences – as Schatz and Wood implicitly do in the examples discussed above.

Moreover, even when David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985) finally studied a popular film aesthetic, it developed as a static model of cinematic form that seeks to determine the principles of a formal system common across genre films and other Hollywood productions of a given period. In an approach similar to film genre categorization, Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson demonstrate "to what extent Hollywood filmmaking adheres to integral and limited stylistic conventions" (1985, 3). While their work contributes to the development of scholarly considerations of the cinematic form of film genre, this approach undertakes a generalization of classical Hollywood's formal system

rather than the close readings for the individual forms of films as sparking speculation. In the wake of their work, the analysis of the cinematic form of genre films becomes a means of determining how a film adheres to or disavows the practices of the system. This type of analysis mimics the concern of film genre theory that examines whether or not a film belongs to a genre. Additionally, at the core of their classical Hollywood aesthetic is a procedure for formal categorization that pursues meaning as arising through an engagement with conventions and standards. Consequently, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* and its legacy develop an account of popular cinema and aesthetic pleasure that traces how formal devices guide the reader in enjoyable film viewing experiences – a concept I confront more in the next chapter.

This focus on the responses of spectators pushes formal deliberations into the realm of responses to cinematic form, and not the reading for form. Although Bordwell and other neo-formalists, such as Krisitin Thompson and Noël Carroll, are clearly interested in the formal properties of popular films, the development of their cognitivism and neo-formalism also refuses to risk a speculative reading for forms. Instead, this approach uses cinematic form as a means of establishing novel approaches to categorization – the classical Hollywood system as a mode of production and style becomes a genre-like category – and to spectatorship – the cognitive activity of viewers that occurs in response to the formal properties of cinema. Therefore, much like the work of Thain and other Deleuzian engagements with cinematic affect, Bordwell and other neo-formalists begin with cinematic form only to quickly transition to a discussion of accepted filmic methodologies: categorization or spectatorship. In short, cinematic form becomes reduced as a way to meaning and not as a creation of meaning. This result that limits or discounts the meaning of forms – in addition to non-formalist approaches that set the conditions to view genre films as aesthetically poor and simple – demonstrate how negative assessments of film

genre and Hollywood from early film genre theory continued to have long-lasting effects, which shape the way scholars approach and analyze popular films, specifically the tendency to dismiss the vibrancy of genre film as sites to read for form.

However, even if genre films are aesthetically impoverished in terms of a traditional philosophical approach to beauty – which I would contest, but it is beyond the scope of my dissertation – I argue that genre films are formally robust. That is to say, if film genres are dynamic and elude static definition, if genre films can function as catalysts for the transformation of subjectivities, and if the formal conventions of genre films can be examined in terms of both categorization and cognition, then the multiplicity of these outcomes reveals that genre films are individually vibrant. Genre films are vibrant sites for reading for forms because they are the vital, pulsating source of emission that radiates through all of the various approaches to their meanings. "Put simply, genre movies are those commercial feature films which," states Grant, "through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations" (2007, 1). The one word that often gets lost in a discussion of genre films, from Grant's statement, is variation. As Grant outlines, it is through repetition and *variation* that genre films tell their stories. For example, Western films often end in a showdown and more often than not the bad guy dies, but showdowns are never formed in exactly the same way. Genre films are vibrant sites because, even through the repetition of familiar characters, stories, and situations, there is always a forming of difference that takes shape through the complex relations of any individual film. From my theoretical position, informed by Brinkema, Deleuze, and Spinoza, the power of difference pushes these familiarities into new assemblages and maps new relations and affects through which forces and intensities open up new modes within film genre and their conventions.

Consider, for example, John Ford's use of "Shall We Gather at the River" in three distinct situations in *Stagecoach* (1939), *My Darling Clementine* (1946), and *The Searchers* (1956). I adopt a reading approach that is concerned with representations in order to demonstrate the explicit differences even without a close reading for form. Near the beginning of *Stagecoach*, "Shall We Gather at the River?" plays in the background non-diegetically as Dallas and Doc Boone are being driven out of town by the social prejudice of the pious ladies of the Law and Order League. There are no words sung and just the joyous notes of "Shall We Gather at the River?" are heard juxtaposed with Doc's mocking of the conformist society that is ostracizing them from the town. The music in relation to Dallas and Doc's exit from the town can be read as representing the restrictiveness of civilization and the need for adventurous people to move west where there is fertile land without social prejudice. Here the song is a force pushing the unwanted characters west with a promise of fruitfulness for them beyond the confines of society while the tone mocks the ridiculous harshness of society itself. Conversely, when the song is heard diegetically in *My Darling Clementine*, the situation is very different, as Wyatt Earp and Clementine appear prim and proper on the boardwalk of Tombstone. As the song begins and the townspeople can be heard singing the lyrics, Wyatt and Clementine lock arms in a manner that is similar to that taken by Doc and Dallas in *Stagecoach*, but there are important differences. As opposed to the tight framing and crowded image in *Stagecoach*, suggesting the restrictions of civilization, the framing in *My Darling Clementine* is loose and, as the scene progresses, the wide-open landscape of the frontier becomes contrasted with town buildings and the newly framed church steeple. "Shall We Gather at the River" has a much more somber tone in this example, but there seems to be an equal amount of optimism about the west and within this particular town that is embracing a balance somewhere between the lawlessness of the frontier

and the overt restrictions of established civilization. Wyatt and Clementine seem to reflect the perfect union to bond the possibilities of this ideal America. In this instance, the song is a force of calm and progress blooming in a burgeoning community amidst the harsh frontier. By the time "Shall We Gather at the River?" is heard in *The Searchers*, it initially fails to bring all the optimism and possibilities as projected onto the west in the previous two Ford Westerns. Instead, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) hears the song clumsily sung by fellow settlers and feels it as a diminishing force restraining his ability to act on behalf of his murdered family because it delays his riding off in search of vengeance. The makeshift graveyard, where the characters are burying the dead, shows us the harsh realities at the other end of the glorified western expansion in *Stagecoach* and *My Darling Clementine*, as much of *The Searchers* is self-reflexive about the dreams and illusions associated with the Western. However, as Ethan breaks up the song and charges past the camera, "Shall We Gather at the River?" can be heard playing, again non-diegetically, but this time as background music. It is during this playing that Martin and Laurie embrace and the song has a tone of earnestness that is reminiscent of the scene in *My Darling Clementine*. This embrace foreshadows the ending of the film where troubling aspects of western expansion are rejected – such as Ethan riding off, seemingly taking his overt racism along with him – but the patriarchal ideals of the frontier remain as the marriage of Martin and Laurie connotes the persistence of the fertile frontier through the union of a man and woman in a heteronormative marriage.

Ford's frequent use of the song came to see it identified with his Westerns. And, even though it carries with it certain connotations because of its Biblical associations, Ford put it to use in varying situations that affect and are affected by the films in divergent ways. However, it is Sam Peckinpah's use of the song in *The Wild Bunch* (1969) that launches a violent shock

throughout the film itself and the Western genre as a whole. At the beginning of the film, as the wild bunch are covertly and diligently robbing a bank and a group of bounty hunters impatiently waits in hiding for their chance to attack the wild bunch, the temperance union sings "Shall We Gather at the River?" with an accompanying band as they begin to march through the street towards the bank. Ford's scenes were built around a single group of people and line of action: we follow the conflict between Dallas and Doc with the townspeople in *Stagecoach*, Wyatt and Clementine's walk to church in *My Darling Clementine*, and the abrupt ending of the funeral in *The Searchers*. On the contrary, Peckinpah composes the scene in *The Wild Bunch* around the perspective of three distinct groups of people: the wild bunch's robbery, the anxious ambush of the bounty hunters, and the townspeople obliviously marching and singing. This rendition of "Shall We Gather at the River?" by the temperance union does not carry the jovialness, the somberness, or even the clumsiness of any of the renditions in Ford's Westerns. Instead, the song projects ridiculousness and pretentiousness through its relation to the pious members of the town march in ignorance of the multiplicity of evils hidden within their community. Peckinpah fractures conventional views of the law within the Western genre by presenting the criminals in the scene favorably while the bounty hunters, representing the law, appear grotesque and repugnant. With each note of "Shall We Gather at the River?" and as the camera moves ever closer to the abhorrent faces of the bounty hunters, the scene is pushed increasingly closer to revealing violence and greed as the driving force of western expansion. In doing so, the scene also reveals the deceptive and phony nature of the institutions and beliefs that purport western expansion to be a righteous destiny and attempt to hide the violent and greed at its core – appropriately, it is the use of the temperance union as cover by the wild bunch that allows them to escape. Fittingly, the gunshots drown out the song before the music stops because, as violence

and greed erupt into a spectacle, the transition divulges that gunshots and screams are more accurately the soundtrack of western expansion and the frontier. Moreover, this transition points to gunshots and screams as being a force that pushes the western genre in the decades following *The Wild Bunch* as the genre explored its naturalized fallacies and confronted the previously disregarded atrocities committed during this historical period.

Focusing explicitly on the formal and narrative implications of "Shall We Gather at the River?" in Ford's Westerns and Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* demonstrates that there is much more than just the repeating of the same song. Even within Ford's films, there are abundant differences between his uses of the song: sometimes diegetic, sometimes non-diegetic, and sometimes both; with and without lyrics; during petty moments and serious moments and emotional moments and romantic moments; to highlight the shortcomings of piety and the dangers of lawlessness; and to mark beginnings as well as endings. In short, "Shall We Gather at the River?" takes many meanings in Ford's films as well as a different meaning in Peckinpah's film. In this sense, film genres are always mutating as new films transform conventions – this is inherent to genre itself. "Since genres are not fixed categories and constantly mutate into new forms," argues Deleyto, "what critics call transgression or subversion is often nothing more than part of the evolution inherent to all film genres" (2012, 229). Furthermore, mutating into new forms is an integral component of genre films, which take shape through the vibrant intensities sparked by the power of difference. Subsequently, what confounds fixed categories and static definitions is not some transcendent state of film genre, but instead the immanent difference of each and every individual film that takes shape through its own becoming. Therefore, what makes film genres ongoing processes is what makes genre films affect the bodies and minds of viewers, what also makes them readable in terms of socio-cultural significance, and what also

makes them definable as stylistic conventions: the vibrancy of each film. This shaping, structuring, and configuring sparked by the intensities and relations within individual films marks the events where I closely read masculinities as forms.

Masculinities Studies

My engagement with masculinities studies is fostered by the alignment of the field with feminist theory that seeks to dismantle patriarchal hierarchy through movement towards gender, sexual, class, racial, and species equality. Focused on the decentering of male privilege, I embrace masculinities studies discourses that tie into the work of Harry Brod and his framing of the field as a complement to women's studies. In *The Making of Masculinities*, Brod outlines a "new men's studies" that "does not recapitulate traditionally male-biased scholarship. Like women's studies, men's studies aims at the emasculation of patriarchal ideology's masquerade as knowledge" (1987, 40). While the field is now commonly referred to as masculinities studies as opposed to men's studies – in order to point to the diverse socio-cultural construction of masculine subjectivities and the multiplicity of potentialities for exploring the lives, bodies, and actions of men – Brod's framing of the field is an important counter to other movements associated with men's studies that advocate for men's rights and take problematic positions in relation to essentialist discourses of masculinity and patriarchal hierarchy as well as modes of masculinity that support and are supported by patriarchy. In Brod's work I find a pathway towards feminist theory that launches thinking for masculinities as forms rather than static sets of ideals, fixed definitions, or internal essences.

R. W. Connell's *Masculinities* is another important contribution to the field of masculinities studies because the work foregrounds the multiplicity of possibilities for masculine

subjectivities as well as their socio-cultural formations. "Masculinities are, in a word," states Connell, "historical" (2005, 185). Connell's work is a thorough study of the discourses and knowledges that inform historical conceptions of masculinities as well as a detailed sociological account of the life histories of four distinct male groups and an account of the historical and political implications of masculinities. While I am focused on the concepts and tools that I read in Connell's work for opening up the field, the book has many more important and robust potentialities beyond those I will discuss here. Foremost, Connell's discussion of the attempts made to change masculinities informs a key pathway of my research. "Arguments that masculinity should change often come to grief," Connell states, "not on counter-arguments against reform, but on the belief that men *cannot* change, so it is futile or even dangerous to try. Mass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life" (ibid. 45). This reflects not only the rejections posed by essentialist views of masculinity, but also the efforts of many masculinities studies projects that seek to positively reform masculine subjectivities. In place of the problematic notions of a fixed, true masculinity, there is a new set of ideals drafted to replace them that posit an array of attributes assumed to be better suited to a transforming socio-cultural milieu. As a result, essentialist movements – such as Robert Bly's mythopoetic masculinity, which I discuss in detail in Chapter Three – reject these new sets of ideals as being unmasculine. Even if it is ridiculous to claim that anything is essential to masculinities, because new sets of ideals defer and deny embodiment like any other set of ideals – including toxic modes – a projection of failure often arises when masculine subjectivities do not fulfill the archetype modeled for them. Therefore, there is a constant push and pull between essentialist models that draw favor when men feel unmasculine due to their failure to

embody new ideals, and these new models that can draw favor when men are unable to embody the characteristics of the essential models.

Connell's work moves thinking beyond this back and forth because it embraces an understanding of masculinities as an ongoing composition. In *Masculinities*, Connell outlines two competing theories of men's bodies: either as a machine that produces masculinity, or a neutral site that is socially constructed (ibid. 45-46). Connell is not entirely satisfied with either definition. Instead, Connell's theory conceptualizes masculinities as complex relations because bodies matter and, according to this view, when sexual difference or gender becomes merely a performance or a discourse this view is problematic (ibid. 51). This claim has immediate connections to the work of Judith Butler on gender and feminist theory, which I do not have the space to adequately address in the confines of this dissertation because my goal is to build a theory through Deleuze and Spinoza's philosophies of immanence and the ramifications this thinking has on theories of affect. That being said, I do discuss some of Butler's influence on cinema studies and gender in Chapter Two, which is employed by some interpretations of gendered representations in cinema with a problematic misreading of performativity. Since I am already engaged in a rethinking of Deleuzian theories of cinematic affect, I leave this important, albeit future, engagement with Butler's theory and its intersections with cinema studies and masculinities studies for now. For my purposes here, Connell's theory is sufficient because it maps how bodies are in relations with a socio-cultural milieu as well as actively entering into a multiplicity of connections that generate life and its perseverance.

Furthermore, I read Connell's work as having the potential to move masculinities beyond individual understandings that position masculine subjectivities as somehow purely produced by the actions of a self. "Body-reflexive practices, argues Connell, "are not internal to the

individual" (ibid. 64). This thinking is instrumental for moving past essentialist notions that position masculinity as an internal production to be maintained by a self through specific actions. "They involve social relations and symbolism; they may well involve large-scale social institutions. Particular versions of masculinity," argues Connell, "are constituted in their circuits as meaningful bodies and embodied meanings. Through body-reflexive practices, more than individual lives are formed: a social world is formed" (ibid.). Therefore, I read Connell's view of masculinities as generated through relations beyond the individual as a conceptual mode for mapping how masculinities are always changing, a reading of Connell allows for a shift from a concentration on a static and fixed being to what Deleuze and Guattari (2004) conceptualize as becoming. Consequently, the focus on individual characteristics gives way to a focus on the relations that bodies enter into with other bodies, and the affects generated by these interactions. Furthermore, I read Connell in support of the recognition that no self, or individual body, exists or persists without a series of relations that form a socio-cultural milieu. This work provides the basis for more recent theories within masculinities studies, especially the work of Todd Reeser. "Masculinity does not have any single meaning," argues Reeser, "even for a given individual, but its definition changes through relations to various external factors that arise" (2010, 42). Reeser's definition is informed by Connell's view that masculinities are produced through gender relations, which requires masculinities studies projects to put as much attention on the bodies and forces that interconnect to form masculinities as is put on particular qualities or characteristics of masculinities themselves. "Masculinity has no meaning in itself," continues Reeser, "but only in the way it is put in dialogue with an other and in the way in which it is perceived by someone else at a given moment in a given space" (ibid.). Although neither Connell nor Reeser are engaging theories of affect directly, I read their work as supporting a conceptualization of

masculinities as intimately bound within relations that demonstrate the potentialities to think and imagine masculinities as forms. My methodology takes into account how masculinities affect and are affected by forces through relations.

Another important observation I make regarding Connell's work is that, despite many different efforts, it is difficult to produce a science of masculinity (2005, 67). "'Masculinity' is not a coherent object," according to Connell, "about which a generalizing science can be produced" (ibid.). This characteristic makes it difficult, if not impossible, to claim an essential, static set of characteristics for a masculinity or masculinities. Connell argues, "we can see masculinity, not as an isolated object, but as an aspect of a larger structure" (ibid.). This realization becomes important for pushing beyond binary structures of masculinities that try to validate understandings of masculinity through oppositional logic against static and fixed definitions of femininity. My reading of Connell supports an approach that fractures the possibilities of using binary logic to conceive of masculinities, thereby generating a shift towards masculinities as forms. I read Connell's work as opening up a position with the capacity to conceptualize masculinities as dynamic processes composed through a multiplicity of relations. "Masculine subjectivity would thus not be a stable, unified event, nor would it be considered as something simply destabilized as one element of some binary opposition, or as one element of a series of binary oppositions. Rather," argues Reeser, "masculinity would be conceived as something that is fully outside a binary system, in a constantly changing process of movement, always mutating" (2010, 48). This is key to my project because reading masculinities as forms embraces this conception that moves beyond binary opposition in order to map the relations that affect and are affected by the shaping, the structuring, and the configuring of masculinities within any dynamic event. Much like my understanding of film genre, this theoretical approach

generates a conceptualization of masculinities as a fluid and creative force with no allegiance to any static set of ideals or innate normalization.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress the theoretical foundations of this approach because, despite the best efforts of masculinities studies and feminist theory, many discourses continue to project essential qualities onto a masculinity – and a femininity, for that matter. "While a man might think that there is no such thing as a masculine essence and while it may in fact be true that there is no gendered essence," states Reeser, "many men nonetheless *experience* masculine subjectivity as essence" (ibid. 50). Therefore, experiences of masculinities continue to be structured through essentialist models that adhere to binaristic formations. Conceptualizing masculinities as dynamic forms requires a rethinking that does not merely take a point in opposition to toxic modes of masculinity – such as men should not be violent or men should be more emotional – because this very opposition remains embedded within the logic that produces the experience of masculine subjectivity as essence. If a masculinities studies discourse advocates for a mode of masculinity that is understood as positive in opposition to a normative and essentialist mode of masculinity that is seen as toxic, this mounts a static set of characteristics against another fixed definition that restricts considerations of masculinities to an understanding that is internal to an individual. For example, the notion that men should not be violent manufactures an oppositional logic that defines masculinities through categorization and not relations, and this procedure validates an individualistic understanding of masculinities that positions a subject based on a static set of characteristics. Within this individualistic approach, masculinities are defined based on a set of choices made from binary oppositions, which are vulnerable to challenges from an essentialist and normative model that will focus on the preferential binary choice adopted by the positive modes of masculinities and claim it

undermines a masculine authenticity or essence. Therefore, the notion that men should not be violent can become misconstrued as an attack on the essence of an individual, which constructs a sense of victimization because of this perceived categorical dismissal of a characteristic understood as internal. These types of misconstrued attacks produce the basis for, in Susan Faludi's (1991) terms, a backlash.

However, resisting the construction of an opposition to characteristics understood as toxic or negative might seem to be a means of supporting or condoning the very masculine behaviors that are cause for concern. The notion that we should stop telling men to refrain from violence is, of course, preposterous, but restricting this rejection of male violence as internal to individuals allows the systems and structures that produce the possibilities of this violence to remain intact. By using an oppositional logic that defines masculinity through binary choices – such as men should not be violent – any male subjectivity that embraces the negative side of the binary becomes an aberrant individual rather than the inevitable outcome of problematic socio-cultural and political systems and discourses that foster male violence. In turn, the onus is placed on the individual to align with the positive side of the binary without addressing the socio-cultural and political relations that maintain the production of male violence. Popular culture is one such site where essentialist discourses can be manufactured and maintained. One of the main motivations for this maintenance is the preservation of an informal patriarchal hierarchy – which supports and is supported by a mode of masculinity – and an economy of power that privileges men. "Gender terms are contested," reminds Connell, "because the right to account for gender is claimed by conflicting discourses and systems of knowledge" (2005, 3). Therefore, conceptualizing masculinities as forms draws attention to the complex relations that structure and shape masculine subjectivities, which can be theorized to develop tools to confront not only the

fact that static and fixed gender ideals are problematic but also to affirm new pathways for fostering relationships, communities, systems, societies, and cultures that emphasize collective striving and persevering as an ongoing process rather than privileging individual isolation.

In my view, reading masculinities as forms generates a conception of masculinities as creative force (McDonald 2016). My main argument here is that instead of working towards transcendent ideals of masculinities that continually defer and deny embodiment – sets of ideals, whether framed as positive or negative – I propose that we consider masculinities as creative force, which resists definition by its capacity to affect and be affected. These transcendent ideals of masculinities continually defer and deny embodiment precisely because any model given to us from the illusion of a transcendent outside meaning can never be achieved. As we are ever changing and shifting, it is impossible to remain stable enough to achieve an ideal. Competing with this definition are four main concepts for defining masculinities, as outlined by Connell: essentialist, positivist, normative, and semiotic. Connell states that essentialist "definitions usually pick a feature that defines the core of the masculine, and hang an account of men's lives on that" (ibid. 68). This definition has been discussed already, but I think it is worth pointing out how a feature or an aspect becomes the core of the definition as suggested here. In some modes of masculinity – such as the mythopoetic model offered by Bly, for example – connections with wilderness are essential.

This essentialist definition is still prevalent, especially within discourses that attempt to maintain patriarchal hierarchies and the modes of masculinity that support and are supported by them, because it provides a justification for unchanging behavior. "*Positivist* social science," contrariwise, as Connell outlines, as an "ethos emphasizes finding the facts, yields a simple definition of masculinity: what men actually are" (ibid. 69). This method for defining

masculinities can involve an examination of the patterns that structure the lives of men through a consideration of how these patterns are understood as an essence of masculinity for that given culture. For Connell, a problem arises because the difference between men and women then leads to wonder about differences between men, which in turn demonstrates that any pattern cannot produce a stable definition because there are always changes in that pattern as well as subjectivities that do not fit within its structures. "*Normative* definitions," according to Connell, "recognize these differences and offer a standard: masculinity is what men ought to be" (ibid. 70). But, as I discussed in the opening of this chapter in relation to *The Big Lebowski*, this definition is often met with conflicting views as well as residues that always return to challenge any model that is set. "*Semiotic* approaches" compose another means of constructing a definition that has already been discussed, and for Connell these definitions "abandon the level of personality and define masculinity through a system of symbolic difference in which masculine and feminine places are contrasted. Masculinity is, in effect, defined as not-femininity" (ibid.). Again, this reinforces a binary logic that breaks down against challenges from feminist theory and the socio-cultural construction of femininity. In this definition, patriarchal hierarchy – which supports a normative definition of masculinity and the privileging of men – project limiting definitions onto feminine and minoritarian subjectivities in order to restrict their access to privileged positions. Although it is framed through a normalized binary logic, interrogation of this logic reveals that the very claims that these places produce gendered and racial subjectivities is refuted upon the recognition that this power structure is itself a socio-cultural construction with no legitimate claim to exist other than an exclusionary, violent, and arbitrary hierarchy.

My conceptualization of masculinities as creative force (McDonald 2016) is an important alternative to the insistence on sets of ideals and defining characteristics as well as a means for

generating alternative modes for thinking about the forms of masculinities in relation. This is in direct response to these definitions outlined by Connell that each fashion a transcendent mode of masculinity – a mode that is produced and validated by an external discourse and meaning structure. "Even when we do acknowledge gender," masculinities scholar Michael Kimmel argues, "we often endow manhood with a transcendental, almost mythic set of properties that still keep it invisible" (2006, 3). Therefore, and as Connell's work demonstrates, Kimmel points to the definitional practices that are themselves never complete in the sense that they are abstract, which contributes to the difficulties men encounter when they attempt to embody these ideals that continuously defer and deny. "We think of manhood as eternal," Kimmel claims, "a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man" (ibid.). This myth perpetuates a belief that a mode of masculinity, no matter how idealized, can somehow be embodied if the correct directions are followed or if the correct aspects are assembled. "Either we think of manhood as innate, as residing in the particular anatomical organization of the human male," Kimmel proposes, "or we think of manhood as a transcendent tangible property that each man manifests in the world, the reward presented with great ceremony to a young novice by his elders for having successfully completed an arduous initiation ritual" (ibid.). This summary of how masculinities are generally conceived highlights the problematic traits of these definitions. Either masculinities are something within a person that this person cultivates or they something they seek out and possess. Consequently, both outlooks promise men that these ideals are achievable, so when the embodiment of these modes are deferred and denied then men either look to increase their pursuits in extreme fashion (this explains the pursuit of mythopoetic masculinity as discussed in Chapter Three), or they look for someone to blame (this explains the masculine crisis discourse as discussed in Chapter Four).

However, these beliefs come from somewhere. History makes important contributions, according to Connell, that guide us in understanding how certain definitions develop. "It is clear from such studies that definitions of masculinity," Connell argues, "are deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions and of economic structures. Masculinity is not just an idea in the head, or personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged in organized social relations" (2005, 29). This echoes my understanding of masculinities as undertaking continuous composition by ongoing processes of relations, which I read through the forms of the Western film genre in Chapter Three and the masculine crisis film in Chapter Four. That being said, Connell's conceptualization of relations is more stringent than mine. "No masculinity," Connell claims, "arises except in a system of gender relations" (ibid. 71). Therefore, Connell frames these social relations as gendered. Conversely, I see the processes of relations that affect and are affected by masculinities as less strictly tied to gender alone and more open to the many different types of bodies and encounters that are generated within any environment. Throughout my analysis of genre films, I illuminate this conceptualization of relations by reading cinematic forms as the sites where these affects and, by extension, these relations are visible.

A final point from Connell's work that is important for my project relates to the theory of feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, which Connell recognizes in *Masculinities*. "Gender emerged in her treatment," Connell states, "as an evolving engagement with situations and social structures. Different gender forms are different ways of life rather than fixed character types" (ibid. 19). Connell is cautious about this claim, even though there is a resonance with the claims in *Masculinities*, because there is a possibility of missing the power dynamics between these different ways of life and the structures that condition them. This is a reality of which Beauvoir's work is intimately aware and is instead a point of emphasis Connell does not want to miss. "To

recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity," argues Connell, "relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity" (ibid. 37). To emphasize the politics and power dynamic within relations of masculinities, Connell conceptualizes hegemonic masculinity. This concept has a profound influence on the field of masculinities studies. "A history of manhood must, therefore, recount two histories," Kimmel claims in an explicit use of Connell's theory: "the history of the changing 'ideal' version of masculinity and the parallel and competing versions that coexist with it" (2006, 4). Therefore, one definition of masculinities in any given moment is never possible because, in Beauvoir's terms, there are so many different ways of life.

However, a dominant or hegemonic masculinity is never in complete control. There are always possibilities for a different mode of masculinity to emerge and displace the hegemonic mode (Connell, 2005, 37). Both dominant and non-dominant modes of masculinity are unstable, which is a key recognition for any theoretical endeavor that seeks to rethink and reimagine masculinities because it illuminates the fact that transformations are always a potentiality even if there is resistance. Also, it is important to note that after the initial formation of this concept it was contested, perhaps most notably in *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity* (Howson 2006), and it was even revised by Connell in "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). These contestations and revisions offer important insights for using hegemonic masculinity as a tool for reading socio-cultural and lived experiences of men, but, as a theoretical concept, Connell's definition in *Masculinities* fulfills my purposes of exploring masculinities through cinematic forms and affects. Therefore, in my analysis any use

of hegemonic, or even dominant, masculinity should be conceived as related to Connell's discussion in *Masculinities* because this is where the concept is most vibrant theoretically. "'Hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather," Connell states, "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable" (2005, 76). This conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity allows for readings that differentiate power dynamics as well as highlighting where potential disruptions occur because of the responses put forth by the dominant mode (such uses are especially important for understanding the masculine crisis discourse discussed in Chapter Four).

From these pathways through masculinities studies, as well as film genre and theories of affect, my goal is to build a theory through a film philosophy methodology which asserts that a close reading of cinematic forms must be the foundation of any analysis of masculinities in film. This theory addresses directly the overreliance on spectatorship, psychoanalysis, and gaze theory that dominates discussions of cinema and gender, even at times within masculinities studies itself. Reeser's discussion of media and masculinities emphasizes this practice as his entire chapter in *Masculinities in Theory* is almost exclusively devoted to the male gaze. "Because of the prevalence of film, TV, and other media in twenty-first-century culture, the way visual cultures represent masculinity has great influence," argues Reeser, "over the way the gaze is understood or experienced in culture in a larger sense. Visual culture thus produces masculinity for culture, and, conversely, cultural constructs of masculinity that exist before a visual text influence visual culture" (2010, 111). While I do not reject this claim outright, it is problematic if this is the only methodology through which we read masculinities in cinema studies. In the following chapter, I map pathways that break through interpretational approaches that rely on

oppositional logic and representations of gender. Then I proceed to establish my film philosophy methodology through Brinkema's radical formalism and other important discussions of film form from the history of film theory. This theoretical discussion sets up my final two chapters, which focus extensively on the forms of masculinities in the Western film and the masculine crisis film during the 1990s as a means to launch speculation that seeks the unthought and the not yet potentialities of masculinities as creative force.

- CHAPTER TWO -

Dismantling Representation from Within, Or: How to Read Masculinities as Forms

In this chapter, I seek to dismantle tools of representation from within by re-reading Laura Mulvey's influence on film theory and gender, which I use to uncover the potential for approaching masculinities as forms. I then use this theoretical re-reading to work back through Brinkema's radical formalism and other important contributions to the study of cinematic form in order to generate the theoretical basis for my own close readings of masculinities as forms in American genre films of the 1990s, which follows in Chapters Three and Four. My main point of contention, carried over from the previous chapter that confronted generic categorization, is that the filmic analysis of gender, built on the recognition of and emphasis on representations, denies the vibrancy of cinematic form by treating films as static and fixed texts. The recognition of representations works to identify how a film can be organized into what we already know, which structures a response to what the elements of the film denote and connote. This type of reading establishes that aspects of a film – usually narrative elements and characters – represent pre-existing signs and ideas with socio-cultural significance or that the style of a film imparts a meaning for a universal spectator. However, if genre films are vibrant sites for reading for forms, then a reading of gender – and specifically masculinities – demands a speculative exploration with the capacity to think the unthought and the not yet as new concepts. In other words, my close reading for form is a speculative exercise that embraces the intensities of cinematic form through Deleuze's conceptualization of difference, which launches the materialization of new thinking and potentials for masculinities rather than demonstrating masculinities as examples of preexisting categories or essentialist and normative definitions. Difference, for Deleuze, is the

unique experience of each event as it takes shape, which I embrace to focus on the distinct circumstances within cinematic form. This is an alternative approach to the recognition of representation that views films as being composed of static elements, which are interpreted as signifying predetermined categories or as associated with some original of which they are copies – elements represent something else. "The prefix RE- in the word representation," argues Deleuze, "signifies this conceptual form of the identical which subordinates differences" (2004, 68). Therefore, the recognition of representation is a denial of difference because it only establishes how something relates to something else. "Difference," states Deleuze, "must be shown *differing*" (ibid.). Closely reading cinematic form is a process that achieves this showing.

Consider Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993). This film, when treated as a static and fixed text by scholars, is interpreted through a recognition of representations, which understands masculinities as routinely organized by two primary models for theoretically analyzing gender representation in cinema: performativity and the gaze. Through the recognition of representation, scholars interpret *The Ballad of Little Jo* as an example of Judith Butler's notion of performativity as commonly used by film theory. For instance, discussing the binary structure of women's and men's fantasies of the Western, Tania Modleski claims that "a film like *Ballad* forcefully challenges this binary system, stirring up the kind of 'gender trouble' celebrated by theorists such as Judith Butler" (1999, 151). Because Josephine Monaghan passes as a man (known as Little Jo) in the frontier communities of the film, scholars connect this character and narrative to Butler's *Gender Trouble* to claim that part of the film's socio-cultural significance is Jo's passing and this can be understood as signaling a revision to the genre through its perceived contemporary representation of gender theory. "Furthermore, by showing that gendered identity can be achieved by active role playing and costume," argues Grant, "the film foregrounds the

postmodern idea of gender as performance rather than as immutable" (2007, 83). Butler's notion of performativity, in these examples, becomes a shorthand for ascribing meaning to the film by allowing scholars to demonstrate the recognition of narrative elements and characters as examples of pre-existing structures of knowledge. Jo acts like a man, and other frontier men and women view her masculinity as legitimate in the film, even though she is a woman. This representation links to an established theoretical idea that gender is constituted by social acts associated with either masculinity or femininity, which compose one's identity – a basic sketch of Butler's notion of performativity – and because Jo is able to pass as a man, despite being a woman, this film is marked as having socio-cultural significance in its support of this contemporary theory of gender. However, these interpretations of *The Ballad of Little Jo* as representing Butler's notion of performativity offer little, if any, indication of how Butler's ideas are interconnected with the form and content of the film other than interpreting how it affects a universal spectator.

Through the recognition of representation, established theoretical concepts often stand in the place of closely reading for form in the assumption that the theory is so well understood and self-evident that the film, as a static and fixed text, can be organized within its meaningful denotation and connotation. In this regard, gender trouble and gender as performance explain what gender in the film is and what Jo's masculinity represents to spectators. However, a closer examination of Butler's concept reveals that the theoretical shorthand used to recognize representation in *The Ballad of Little Jo*, in these examples, is perhaps less understood and self-evident than it initially appears. "Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous," argues Butler, "then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience,

including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (1999, 191-192). In this sense, gender as performance seems to align with Jo's representation of masculinity because Jo acts like other men around her – including changing her clothes and mimicking masculine behavior, like the dinner etiquette she observes in Ruby City. Not only do the other frontier men and women believe Jo is a man, but she too develops a belief in her masculinity through her willingness to challenge other men, which becomes naturalized as her identity. However, this performance of masculinity, due to Jo's believable acts, is hardly constitutive of Butler's notion of gender trouble even if it is a gender performance. "If these styles are enacted," asks Butler, "and if they produce the coherent gendered subjects who pose as their originators, what kind of performance might reveal this ostensible 'cause' to be an 'effect'?" (ibid. 191). In other words, Jo appears to represent the posing of a coherent gendered subject that is far from the type of performance – in *Gender Trouble* drag is given as an example – that Butler envisions as revealing that gender acts have no actual allegiance to the male or female sex. Throughout her life on the frontier, Jo is accepted as a man except when Percy discovers her secret and in her romantic relationship with Tinman. However, in both of these cases neither Percy nor Tinman are particularly unsettled or troubled. In effect, within each of these moments, when Jo is found out to be Josephine, gender seems to matter little, if at all. For Percy, learning Jo is actually Josephine becomes an opportunity for him to exploit her sexually and then, when that fails, economically through blackmail – he is not troubled by the revealing of her gender performance (if only superficially through his statements) and it does not lead him to question his own gendered acts. For Tinman, learning Jo is actually Josephine ignites a shared intimacy built on trust and friendship that appears to be nurtured in spite of gender in a shared sexual attraction that is not necessarily tied to heterosexual performances of gender.

Moreover, Jo's masculinity is only truly questioned once she no longer performs it. In the only gender-troubling scene in the film, Frank becomes undone precisely because he is confronted with the fact that he was duped by Jo's fabrication. "If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies," argues Butler, "then it seems that genders can be neither true or false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (ibid. 186). Through the notion of gender as performance, Frank's anger and frustration can be understood as less of a reaction to Jo's false portrayal and as more of an inability to come to terms with the fact that gender can neither be true or false – Jo was so *damn* masculine. In essence, Jo's body in public interactions became experienced as a true masculine effect, including Jo's learned excellence with a gun. Consequently, Frank's assumption of a primary and stable identity becomes undermined through the revealing of Jo as Josephine, which troubles him by demonstrating a woman can be masculine. For Butler, "the widely cited point that *Gender Trouble* made was the following: that categories like butch and femme were not copies of a more originary heterosexuality, but they showed how the so-called originals, men and women within the heterosexual frame, are similarly constructed, performatively established" (2004, 209). In this sense, revealing Jo as Josephine does not uncover Jo's masculinity to have been a fake, which demonstrates the possibility for interpreting the significance of the film through Butler's theory of performativity.

Jo's ability to so convincingly act a frontier type of masculinity calls into question all of the other gendered subjects within the community as performances, which visibly shakes Frank to his core in a questioning of the primacy and stability of his identity, perhaps not fully realized in Modleski's and Grant's interpretations. "So the ostensible copy is not explained through reference to an origin," argues Butler, "but the origin is understood to be as performative as the

copy" (ibid.). Subsequently, despite the fact that Frank may regard his frontier masculinity as the core of his identity, when little Jo's frontier masculinity is realized as no more than a set of acts written on her body then Frank's core dissolves into an emptiness as his masculinity too can only be understood as a set of acts. "Through performativity," states Butler, "dominant and nondominant gender norms are equalized. But some of those performative accomplishments claim the place of nature or claim the place of symbolic necessity, and they do this only by occluding the ways in which they are performatively established" (2004, 209). Therefore, yes, *The Ballad of Little Jo* represents gender – especially masculinity – as performative, which demonstrates that gendered subjects are not the effect of a primary and stable essence of man or woman. However, what is more interesting about the representation of Jo in this respect, and perhaps not fully realized in Modleski's and Grant's allusions to Butler's theory, is the fact that Jo's performative accomplishment of masculinity claims the place of symbolic necessity. Josephine becomes Jo not to destabilize normative gender performance, but to find security and to access a more dominant position within an economy of power. While some spectators – as well as Frank at the film's conclusion – may experience Jo's representation of masculinity as gender trouble, the film exposes the necessity of performing frontier masculinity as a means of survival against the wilderness as well as other frontier men. Within this economy of power, femininity is tied to stereotypical representations of women – in marriage, domestic labor, and sex work – as well as men viewed as feminine, such as Frank's rebuke of dudes during his introduction to Little Jo. However, even with this more thorough examination of Butler's theory in relation to the film, using performativity for interpretation remains a response that recognizes the representations of *The Battle of Little Jo* in terms of socio-cultural significance for a universal spectator as opposed to a close reading for forms driven by Brinkema's radical

formalism. To reiterate, this remains committed to a binary logic because it treats narrative elements and characters as static and fixed, which are then sorted accordingly to whether or not they represent established socio-cultural, theoretical, or political ideas – for example, gender as performative or immutable.

Mulvey's use of psychoanalysis to examine visual pleasure and narrative cinema is a theoretical approach to representations of gender that is more firmly rooted in cinema studies than Butler's theory of performativity. Modleski and Grant also turn to Mulvey's conceptualization of the male gaze to account for *The Ballad of Little Jo*'s representations of gender. "By making Jo's first lover be the photographer who takes both the Monaghan family photograph and the individual photography of Jo herself," argues Modleski, "Greenwald calls attention to woman's status in classic narrative as object of the gaze" (1999, 158). As will be discussed in greater detail below, this is a fairly standard use of Mulvey's theory of the gaze: the cinematic image objectifies women and structures the position of looking as a male gaze. Modleski recognizes the representations of gender in the film as fitting within this theory because Josephine becomes the object of the camera as well as the male photographer's look – which also presumes a possible looking male spectator to acknowledge all three looks in Mulvey's theory. "Becoming in effect a victim of her biological femininity after she is seduced by the photographer," states Modleski, "Jo is forced to become a man to avoid sexual victimization after she is cast out for bearing a child" (ibid.). At first glance, this claim seems to align the film with Mulvey's gaze theory, but, given the reference Modleski also makes to Butler, this assertion that Josephine is a "victim of her biological femininity" is at odds with Butler's notion of performativity because gender has no true primary and stable identity for Butler – such as a biological femininity in this instance. Therefore, Modleski's recognition of Josephine's

representation seems to have gone awry between two distinct theoretical concepts because if *The Ballad of Little Jo* is a representation of Butler's gender trouble then a biological femininity could not make Josephine a victim. Instead, femininity would be a series of acts written on her body in the same manner that her masculinity is a performance when she becomes Jo within the frontier community. Subsequently, Josephine would be interpreted as a victim of the structural discourses of feminine performance that sustain hierarchies that oppress and victimize. Perhaps, then, the real trouble that the film sparks is within recognitions of representation and not the film itself because these interpretations that rely on Butler to make a point about what the film represents in terms of gender misread Butler's theory.

In Modleski's attempt to sort representations of gender into theoretical categorizations – performativity and the male gaze – there arises a contradiction that can be understood as the breakdown of a binaristic logic attempting to account for representations in a non-oppositional way. That is to say, film theory is used to identify a film as representing the male gaze or not the male gaze, and representing gender as internal to identity or performative. Modleski's combining of theoretical binary choices may be interpreted as the attempt to deal with the representations of gender in *The Ballad of Little Jo*, which complicate either theoretical categorization as used by film theory – Josephine is an object of the gaze, but Jo is not, and Jo displays credible performance of frontier masculinity even though she is a woman. Consequently, film theory struggles to account for this representation of masculinity that refuses binary logic due to the fact that it is simultaneously a masculinity – Jo performs a convincing frontier masculinity – and not masculinity – this is the performance of a woman that undermines and even challenges the male gaze. In other words, film theory struggles to account for difference as differing and instead can only try to talk about masculinity in general – as an instance of performance or within an

established framework of the male gaze. "Through the character of Little Jo, a figure at once male and not male," states Modleski, "*Ballad* suggests that being assigned to only one of two gendered alternatives may be the true source of peoples' 'restlessness,' to recall Mulvey's word" (ibid. 178). This rather cautious claim of Modleski's (this *may* be the true source) is staked on Mulvey's notion that the female spectator shifts restlessly within a viewing position structured as a male point of view by the gaze (ibid. 175). The restlessness of the female spectator, in this sense, arises from the conflict between assuming the male gaze (as it is the only viewing position available in this theory) without embodying the desire or making the identification that goes along with it. Therefore, even if we accept the contradictions within Modleski's recognition of representations as productive, and even if we overlook an apparent misreading of Butler's theory of performativity, then the significance of this analysis is for the spectator – the film causes gender trouble for viewers felt as the effect of restlessness that Modleski interprets as shared with Jo. However, the singularity of the cinematic form – the intensity of the event – is denied in this interpretation to make a claim that is general – that this is another case of restlessness – rather than what is unique – difference in itself – that a close reading of form generates.

Modleski is not the only scholar to combine the performativity and the male gaze in an analysis of *The Ballad of Little Jo*. Grant also relies on the male gaze to identify the significance of gender representations in the film, and he interprets Jo as representing a different type of female action hero than the ones in *Alien* (Scott 1979), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Cameron 1991), *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Harlin 1996), the *Kill Bill* films (Tarantino 2003, 2004), and the *Charlie's Angels* films (McG 2000, 2003). Grant outlines a binaristic debate in respect to these female action heroes in which they are viewed as "progressive, empowering representations of women or merely contained within a masculine sensibility" (2007, 82). The

issue taken with these representations of female action heroes is that the female characters are still objectified by the male gaze despite the powerful, action driving roles of the women in the film, which resembles representations of male action heroes. Hence, the female action heroes are understood as progressive (equal to representations of male heroes in many ways), but simultaneously assumed to be a source of visual pleasure for male spectators. "Greenwald refuses to allow Little Jo, played by former model Suzy Amis, to become an object of the camera's traditionally male gaze as theorised by Laura Mulvey (1989). After escaping from her captors," states Grant, "Josephine obtains some men's clothes at a general store, and then, to the shock of the viewer, slashes her face with a knife from cheek to chin. Her scar becomes a badge of masculinity to the other men in the film, and it prevents the viewer from comfortably regarding her as an object of visual pleasure" (ibid.). Therefore, Jo's scar is recognized as having an effect on spectators because it prevents objectification through the initial shock it causes as well as its persistence throughout the film as a means of deflecting the male gaze onto the scar as connoting toughness – assumptions abound, but we can assume other characters think this scar is the result of a fight. The scar is also a sign of masculinity, for Grant, because it indicates to other characters in the film that Jo is a tough frontiersman.

Jim Kitses also uses psychoanalysis to interpret Jo's scar, but he does not see the scar as a means of deflecting the male gaze or as a badge of masculinity. "The final touch when she had invented herself," states Kitses, "Jo's gash [is] the mark of castration, although not the sign of phallic lack, but rather the gaping wound of the mutilated mother, the price of entry to the land of the free" (1998a, 372). Rather than focusing on the scar in relation to Mulvey's gaze theory, Kitses interprets Josephine's scar as what gives birth to this new identity – Little Jo – while also signifying her acceptance that she has no place to be herself within the frontier. Without delving

too deeply into psychoanalysis (something none of these interpretations offer), Jo's scar for both Kitses and Grant has significance because of what it represents. Either it is taken to be a means of disturbing the male gaze or a symptom of Josephine's transformation into someone with the ability to survive the patriarchal structure of the frontier. The scar is shock to spectators, a badge of masculinity, or a gaping wound. Subsequently, the scar is masculinity because it stops Jo from being objectified by the gaze, it tells other men that Jo is masculine, and it gives Jo the ability to enter the frontier as not-Josephine. The scar is significant because it is not femininity. What becomes apparent through the recognition of representation in *The Ballad of Little Jo* is the insistence on the use of oppositional logic, which assumes narrative elements and characters as static and fixed objects to be categorized accordingly to determine significance for a spectator. Rather than reading for forms as dynamic events arising through the relations within cinematic form, representation becomes a means of identifying and interpreting elements or motifs that are waiting to be found.

Where forms are cinematic processes of shaping, structuring, and configuring (in other words, forces that can generate the unthought and the not yet), motifs are observed as something that lays dormant to be found by a viewer. Motifs preexist as signs waiting to be sorted into binaristic meaning – a scar that is a sign of masculinity and not of femininity. A motif does not have a dynamic emergence of affective forming, and instead a motif is traced as a stable beacon seen by spectators. Where the close reading for form embraces the dynamic and affective processes taking shape to motivate speculation, the tracing of motifs operates as an identification of static elements that relate to a fixed and intended narrative structure. "It's useful to have a term to describe formal repetitions, and the most common term is motif. We shall call *any significant repeated element in a film*," state Bordwell and Thompson, "a motif. A motif may be an object, a

color, a place, a person, a sound, or even a character trait. We may call a pattern of lighting or camera position a motif if it is repeated through the course of a film" (2010, 68). Therefore, the tracing of motifs is a denial of difference that gives the repeated element the same significance over and over again, which foregoes the meticulous reading of vibrant intensities of cinematic form that creates the relations of each event. "Difference is not and cannot be thought in itself," states Deleuze, "so long as it is subject to the requirements of representation" (2004, 330). By continuously making connections that can be applied to countless circumstances – a schema that we realize because of past experiences or the notion of gender as performative because we know of Butler's theory – difference in itself as the singularity of cinematic form cannot be thought – it remains not yet or unthought in a denial of difference. Motifs are static signs that offer the means for significance or association either at a narrative level (understanding the plot and deriving pleasure) or at a socio-cultural and political level (understanding what the film represents). Consider the scar in *The Ballad of Little Jo* as read in and for its ineluctably specific complexity – to reference Brinkema's claim cited earlier – which is a reading for form as difference rather than subjecting it to the requirements of representation, or the recognition of representation. Before the scene in which Josephine gives herself the scar, she has spent the night on the run from two former Union soldiers attempting to assault her. Moreover, the entire film up to this point has consisted of her fleeing and living in a type of vagrancy – as noted by Streight Hollander, who first offers her assistance at the beginning of the film. However, this is not simply a running, a fleeing, or a moving because Josephine, after some reluctance, accepts Streight's offer and begins to develop a friendship with him. Unfortunately, he does not return her kindness and attempts to sell her to the Union soldiers, but the soldiers refuse to accept

Streight's monetary demands and shoot him down where he stands before chasing a running Josephine through the woods.

Each of these events, and the ones that follow throughout the film, are shaped by processes of resisting. Even from the opening shot of Josephine walking on the trail, the first thing the image encounters is her parasol resisting the sun. When Streight first approaches Josephine to inquire where she is going, there is resistance within her replies. "Where are you headed?" he asks. "This way," Josephine replies, pointing down the road. However, he resists her resisting. While she tries to refuse his advances through short and curt replies, he eventually convinces her to join him on the wagon – her resistance breaks down. The form of *The Ballad of Little Jo* as resisting reads the vibrant events of the film as dynamic processes that withstand actions or effects, try to prevent by action and argument, attempt to ignore unwanted advances, and struggle against people and things. The scar, within a close reading of form as resisting, becomes more than a response interpreted through an assumed spectator that cannot comfortably objectify Josephine via the male gaze. Just as Josephine fights to resist Streight's hold on her body, then struggles through the woods as branches catch her flowing dress as she flees the soldiers, then battles free from the clutches of a soldier who throws her body over his horse, and then runs into the river that has a force she is unable to resist as it sweeps her downstream, the scarring of her face is a form of resisting. This is not, however, a resistance that involves a looking spectator, but a process that continues throughout the many events and relations that compose the film. However, the film's dynamic processes that form as resisting do not posit characters that resist and those that do not because resisting within the film is structured as a continuum that fluctuates according to the forces of each event.

Whether it is the soil that resists Jo's attempts to find gold and riches, or Jo's resisting of Frank's insistence that he join the rest of the men waiting for a turn with the sex worker in the camp, or the cries of scared sheep that Jo resists when the wolves first arrive in the dark, or the homesteaders and sheep farmers that resist the Western Cattle Company trying to take their land by any means, the film takes shape through processes of resisting. When masculinities are read for as dynamic forms rather than representations of gender as immutable or performative, as active or passive, as an object of the gaze or challenging the gaze, and, moreover, as signified by motifs, then in *The Ballad of Little Jo* masculinities too are a form of resisting. Therefore, Jo is never simply a resister and instead can be read as forming relations through various processes of resisting and ceasing to resist. While Jo initially resists her responsibility to protect Frank's flock under attack by wolves, this event reinforces the necessity of resisting for frontier masculinity that forms through relations that withstand, prevent, ignore, and struggle amidst the many and varying forces of the frontier. This includes preventing wolves from killing any more of your sheep, which Jo eventually does and then wears the furs of the nonhuman animals as a coat that helps her resist the elements as well as doubts of her ability as a frontiersman. However, Jo also ceases to resist in ways that other frontier men do not. Specifically, Tinman is about to be hanged by a bunch of frontier men when he enters Ruby City out of a fear that he may steal their jobs. Just like Frank's stern opposition to dudes, he and the other frontier men also oppose Tinman because of his difference – he is Chinese. Jo intervenes and prevents them from hanging Tinman, which the men agree to if Jo hires him as a cook. Even though Jo initially resists this suggestion, fearing Tinman might discover her secret in such close proximity, she eventually agrees but continues to resist developing a relationship with him through a cold and distant demeanor – no doubt how any frontiersman would treat Tinman. Nevertheless, Jo's resisting ultimately breaks

down and she shares with Tinman an intimate bond through which they cease to resist, but this is also a resisting of the frontier community's expectations of their relationship as master and servant.

The relationship of Jo and Tinman reveals that ceasing to resist while continuing to persevere is affected by one's place within an economy of power. The frontier is a place that necessitates processes of resisting, which can take shape in relation to many things – from harsh weather to physical threats made by others. What Jo learns very quickly in the film is the fact that power is increased through resisting and the potential for resisting is increased through the position one occupies in the frontier power economy. Since she is unable to grow a few more inches in height or to quickly increase her muscle mass, she instead takes advantage of the fact that she is white, adopts clothes associated with men, and scars her face to create an appearance that suggests the capacity for resisting – a form of masculinities. However, a scarring of the face is not always the appearance of power because Percy's cutting of the sex worker's face in Ruby City does not bestow upon her the same power as Jo's scar. The sex worker occupies a position within the power economy of the frontier that does not have the potential for much resisting, and even her resisting of Percy's demands spark relations that decrease her capacity to persevere – the cut on her face now limits her possibilities within the frontier and it brings much physical harm to her body. Therefore, resisting is not always the same and masculinity is not simply resistance or not resistance. In *The Ballad of Little Jo*, masculinities are forms of resisting and, within a frontier economy of power, affective relations – some given, such as sex and race, and others produced, such as attire and reputation – can determine one's potential for resisting. Consequently, Josephine, the sex worker, Tinman, and Mary all have limited, albeit distinct, capacities for resisting – in many situations, their perseverance is increased by ceasing to resist –

but Jo, Frank, Percy, and Henry Gray all have increased capacities for resisting, which take shape in varying relations of cinematic form. For example, Frank's masculinity is formed by resisting and then resisting some more – from dudes to the Western Cattle Company. He is so formed by resisting that, when confronted with the fact that Jo duped him, he tries resisting this very reality by returning to Jo's cabin in a state of disbelief to lash out at her property – a stand in for Jo – until he is confronted by a picture of Josephine that makes it apparent he can no longer resist the fact that Jo was a woman.

From this close reading of form, we can conceptualize masculinities as taking shape through dynamic processes of resisting. Nonetheless, masculinity is not signified as notions of resistance or not resistance because even Jo ceases to resist Percy when he threatens to expose Jo as Josephine, Frank ceases to resist the fact that Jo is Josephine when confronted with her picture, Henry ceases to resist Jo's unwillingness to sell her land when Jo gestures towards a gun, and Jo ceases to resist an attraction to Tinman once he becomes someone she can trust. Masculinities are forms of resisting in *The Ballad of Little Jo* because resisting and ceasing to resist continues in an ongoing fluctuation where even masculinities with a great potential for resisting may be forced or choose to relinquish this potential. This could unfold as a means of perseverance – such as Jo's payment to Percy to prevent him from exposing her – or as a means of joy – such as Jo's romantic relationship with Tinman. While masculinities are not merely resistance, affective relations can generate masculinities with an increased potential for resisting not readily available to others. Therefore, Josephine's becoming Jo by the scarring of her face is the creation of an assemblage with a greater potential for resisting, but this also increases her capacity to cease resisting – for example, it is apparent that only Jo, and not Josephine, could live on the frontier with Tinman in a romantic union.

This close reading generates a conceptualization of masculinities that escapes the binary logic of representations that assume a fixed and static text, which is categorized into associations and signification – such as gender as innate or performance. Reading for forms opens up speculation about what masculinities can do and how we can compose new concepts for thinking beyond notions of masculinity as a static set of characteristics – namely, masculinity in general. In the remainder of this chapter, I continue to dismantle tools of representation by returning to the work of Laura Mulvey in order to reveal cinematic form as a vibrant intensity that not only determines the basis for any perceived viewer's response but also functions as difference – in Deleuze's sense of difference in and of itself – exposing the notion of films as fixed and static texts to be a fallacy. From this thorough critique of representation, I mobilize a formal dismantling of representation back through the radical formalism of Brinkema in order to offer a more robust theory for reading masculinities as forms.

The Denial of Difference in Representation and Neo-Formalism

Reading masculinities as forms requires a move away from a focus on spectatorship in all its modes. The recognition of representation is a mode that uses film form and content as a way to produce significance through a denial of difference, which assumes a film as static and fixed aspects to be sorted into preexisting meanings – such as Jo's scar representing castration or a refusal of the male gaze. Undoing representation aims to illuminate cinematic form as vibrant intensities and sites of difference, which cannot be contained within a binaristic logic used to categorize the assumed responses of spectators into what is already known. Following Herzog, an undoing of representation involves "a fundamental destabilization of the very idea of a representation, displacing notions of signification and association in favor of acts of creation and

images of thought" (2010, 19). Given that film theory, as discussed in the previous chapter, is ill-equipped to engage with masculinity that is not masculinity, undoing representation seeks to equip film theory for acts of creation with the capacity to read masculinities as forms in all of their intricate complexities. Due to a reliance on oppositional structures, a theoretical approach that undoes representation must open up pathways that fracture the practices of signification and association through difference, which can unfold through speculation. In the recognition of representation, spectatorship becomes an ideal site for churning form and content as causes into many different effects that are felt, thought, or understood by a viewer. "Representation operates through immobilization, spatialization. The representation becomes a 'sign'," argues Herzog, "through which we interpret the always-implied referent. It asserts correspondences, analogies, and associations among elements at the expense of their differences, their dynamisms, their movements and changes" (ibid. 23-24). To reiterate, representation takes a film to be a static and fixed text that restricts and limits vibrancy into what is already known – for example, gender represented as either immutable or performative – rather than the processes through which form takes shape – for example, masculinities as a form of resisting. Even though I agree with Brinkema that Deleuzian modes of film theory, like Herzog's, can be read as a reification of the passions (as discussed in chapter one), within Herzog, del Río, and Thain, among others, a pathway develops for difference within spectatorship that can be pushed back into a close reading for forms. While these Deleuzian modes of spectatorship seize formal deliberations as the potential for impacting the bodies and minds of viewers, this type of work is different than the recognition of representation. As Herzog advocates, a Deleuzian approach conceptualizes the expression of difference felt or thought by a viewer through the forces of cinematic images. In my approach, following Brinkema, I read this force back towards forms to determine what

dynamic processes are taking shape within the affective relations of cinematic images in and of themselves.

Where Herzog is skeptical of representation framing films as static and fixed texts, I also note that representation identifies signs, motifs, or other aspects of a film that are read as immobile – producing meanings for spectators through what is already known to exist. Herzog, through Deleuze, identifies this as "the repetition of representation" that results in difference being undermined through a production "where one element comes to stand for, replace, or explain another" (ibid. 145). However, despite this potential for using Deleuze to read difference within a viewer's experience, I read all of these modes of analysis – from Deleuzian to the recognition of representation to neo-formalist and cognitive approaches – as concentrating on spectators as a site that captures the vibrant intensities of cinematic form. Either the spectator is moved in an experience of difference, or the spectator is able to see the established significance of a sign, or the spectator is able to follow the cues to reach the intended meaning and pleasure. Cinematic form becomes something that is processed through the spectator as an effect caused by the film. As discussed in the previous chapter, what separates Deleuzian and other affective modes from the recognition of representation and cognitivist approaches is the notion of difference. Unlike Deleuzian and affective approaches that identify spectators as a site for experiencing difference, representation and cognitivist approaches deny difference outright. "The challenge," argues Herzog, "is to see film not as a means of representation but as an assemblage of images in flux with the world of images, to see the history of film and the history of philosophy as convergent" (ibid. 27). Therefore, rather than the identification of cues and schemas or the male gaze or motifs, closely reading for form embraces difference as a vibrant intensity that overflows any preexisting significance or association as it also overflows any

conclusive definition in a gesture that opens up speculation. Form is always more than and other than a spectator's experience, and it must be closely read for – rather than basing an interpretation on the assumed response of a universal spectator.

Mulvey's theory, especially her concept of the male gaze, is an important foundation for the recognition of representation in the filmic analysis of gender, which works through signification and association. She recognized that early psychoanalytic film theory – popularized by scholars such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz – inadequately addressed the relationship between the cinematic apparatus and spectatorship because it did not address gender. But rather than critiquing psychoanalysis itself, Mulvey uses psychoanalysis to address this issue. Inverting the theoretical tools of psychoanalysis, she exposed the fact that apparatus theory and popular narrative cinema are not gender neutral. "Recent writing in *Screen* about psychoanalysis and the cinema," argues Mulvey, "has not sufficiently brought out the importance of the representation of the female form in a symbolic order in which, in the last resort, it speaks castration and nothing else" (Mulvey, 2009, 14). What she highlights is the fact that the apparatus theory of Baudry and Metz assumed gender neutrality and took the spectator to be universal, but, as Mulvey's theory demonstrates, the cinematic apparatus is far from gender neutral. This contribution is important because – along with other early work on gender and cinema, including Joan Mellen's 1977 book *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in the American Film* – it made visible the impact films can have on the socio-cultural conceptions of gender and how cinema can uphold dominant gendered ideologies. Mulvey champions an acknowledgment of, and attack on, the gender-bias purported by psychoanalytic film theory and the patriarchal structures of popular cinema. This attack exposes the gendered conditions of Hollywood films – popular narrative cinema – and she uses psychoanalytic film theory against its own inadequacies

as opposed to seeking an alternative theoretical approach. However, through Mulvey's work and as important as this realization might be, masculinity becomes a series of signs that always implies the referent of the gaze or castration or some other psychoanalytic concept, which imposes a preexisting theoretical model that is used as a shorthand for determining meaning through representation, as outlined in the preceding analysis of *The Ballad of Little Jo*.

For Mulvey, there appears to be no issue from her position and perhaps no other option than to use the very tools of the theory that ignored gender in the first place. Mulvey sees value in psychoanalytic theory for opening up alternative forms of spectatorship, but this remains a denial of difference within cinematic form because psychoanalysis organizes a response to content and form associated with predetermined theoretical concepts. "Psychoanalytic theory is of intrinsic interest to feminism," states Mulvey, "both because of its content, its analysis of gender and sexuality, and as a formal system which identifies symptoms triggered in the human psyche by sexual difference and its social organisation, and reconfigures them as signs, to be identified and decoded" (2013, 29). A film is a text to be decoded by psychoanalysis and organized according to the socio-cultural significance of the theory's understanding of gender. This is how Kitses, interpretation of *The Ballad of Little Jo* can determine Josephine's scarring of her face as a sign of the wounded mother in association with castration. Furthermore, Mulvey is very much concerned with the ways that narrative cinema has an effect on its audience, in particular the human psyche, as outlined in her connection of psychoanalysis and feminism. This connection has a tangible socio-cultural and political significance because there is a desire to identify the patriarchal structure of narrative cinema as well as to discover how alternative cinemas can undo the pleasure of this spectator position – primarily, the male gaze. Therefore, Mulvey's theory of the gaze is explicitly political and demands that we use her theory not only to

uncover the ideological framework of narrative cinema, but also to use this information to inform a counter or avant-garde feminist cinema.

Despite Mulvey's explicit call for a feminist avant-garde, many film scholars, especially those analyzing gender and cinema, have put Mulvey's theory to work to further scrutinize popular narrative cinema in order to demonstrate the validity of her claims and apply them to new films. D. N. Rodowick argues that Mulvey's essay "was originally meant as a polemic and a necessary preface for a theory of a political, avant-garde film practice" (1994, 225). This is an intention often missed when Mulvey's theory is used, as in the analysis of *The Ballad of Little Jo* outlined above, to identify popular films as representing or not representing an objectification by the male gaze. "Mulvey's essay has been primarily applied to the analysis of mainstream films and of 'reading against the grain.' However," states Rodowick, "in both the introductory and concluding sections of the essay, she herself is quite clear that her purpose is to prepare the way theoretically for a 'politically and aesthetically avant-garde cinema'" (ibid. 225-26). The main point for Mulvey is to mark popular narrative cinema and the visual pleasure derived from this type of cinema as functioning to uphold patriarchal ideology. While the application of Mulvey's theory to new popular narrative films as well as the rethinking of her theory in terms of race, class, and species is productive, the marking of all popular narrative films, in general, as structured by patriarchal ideology has consequences which impact the theoretical framework used to construct the male gaze and other concepts. One of the consequences of this framework is that popular cinema, specifically Hollywood cinema, becomes completely irredeemable from the theoretical position of Mulvey as well as other theorists that propose a countercinema, such as Peter Wollen and Claire Johnston. In opposition to popular narrative films, avant-garde

departures are privileged as producing different types of viewing positions, as Mulvey and Wollen set out to do within *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977).

This dismissal of popular cinema as only ever in the function of oppressive ideologies informs a general denial of difference that undermines the vibrancy of cinematic form. In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, Rodowick outlines how film theory, informed by psychoanalysis and semiology (what he calls political modernism), reached an impasse, and "the most obvious reason is the starkness of the opposition between realism and modernism, which seemed to foreclose any interest in popular cinema as irredeemably compromised by the 'dominant ideology' in content and in form" (1994, xxiii). This foreclosure is the basis for Mulvey's theory of the gaze and Wollen's theory of countercinema, which is informed by a binary logic predicated, at the most basic level, on the moral claim that a certain type of film is bad – supporting dominant ideology – while another type of film is good – capable of displacing or rupturing the dominant ideology. "By the time a psychoanalytic film theory put the question of the subject at center stage, an implicit set of values had already been erected," argues Rodowick, "within the theory of film form offered by political modernism. Whereas popular narrative cinema was characterized by conventions of unity, transparency, closure, and ideological illusion, the forms of countercinema offered discontinuity, materiality, openness, and critical knowledge" (1994, xxiii). Much like the academic development of genre film studies that accepted popular cinema as aesthetically impoverished in order to discuss socio-cultural significance (a point I raised in the previous chapter), film theory – especially psychoanalysis – constructed popular narrative as a mode exclusively functioning for the ideological manipulation of viewers. Therefore, theories of representation – informed by Rodowick's notion of political

modernism – produce two rigid categories founded on binaristic logic, which deny difference in popular film as a means of privileging the avant-garde.

In this regard, Mulvey and psychoanalytic film theory took the mode of countercinema to be able to generate experiences of difference for spectators because they viewed the structures of avant-garde cinema as vibrant in comparison to the structures of popular cinema that were identified as in the service of dominant ideologies. In short, the mode of countercinema could open up the minds of viewers to new ideas because it used different set of stylistic conventions than popular cinema and not because of difference in itself, which is the singular difference of every film mode (popular narrative and radical avant-garde films). However, as I have argued throughout, the cinematic form of any film is vibrant and, thus, this negation of popular film is only possible through the recognition of representation that uses significance and association to deny difference rather than reading the dynamic processes within cinematic form. While an important contribution to the filmic analysis of gender, Mulvey's work still influences the denial of difference that undermines the vibrant intensities of cinematic form. To reiterate, this denial unfolds because her theory is used – as outlined in the interpretations of *The Ballad of Little Jo* above – to sort the film in terms of signification and association with established theories, specifically models of psychoanalysis. "The cinema, with its ability to render visible the invisible and conjure up meanings outside the precision of language," states Mulvey, "creates a cat's cradle of semiotic, symbolic, metaphoric and all the other terms through which human culture has struggled, to work through and find representations for the imprecise and invisible workings of the human mind" (2013, 188). By interpreting films as signifying the interior functioning of the human mind, meaning is produced through external sites marked by spectatorship and the cinematic image becomes a fixed and static site that connects to established significations and

associations. Cinematic form becomes a means to a referent – the human psyche – and representations in the film are sorted according to what they denote and connote, in this case psychoanalytic concepts.

Given the influence of Mulvey's theory on the analysis of gender and cinema, it sets the conditions for using film theory for discussions of gender – and moreover masculinities – in popular cinema. In the wake of Mulvey's gaze theory, Steve Neale noticed that there are little, if any, sustained analysis of masculinities in popular cinema – overlooking Mellen's work – other than the place masculinities occupy within the structure of the gaze. "It is thus very rare to find analyses that seek to specify in detail," argues Neale, "in relation to particular films or groups of films, how heterosexual masculinity is inscribed and the mechanisms, pressures, and contradictions that inscription may involve" (1983, 9). Neale's work is important because it called for an increased discussion of masculinities within popular cinema. While Neale saw the shortcoming of Mulvey's work and delineated the necessity of discussing representations of men as well as women, he also saw her theory as foundational to an analysis of gender within film studies. Therefore, Neale positions his response to Mulvey less as an attack and more as the identification of places to expand and think through the spaces and aspects of her theory (Neale, 1983, 10). For Neale, filmic analysis of masculinities could use Mulvey's theory – following her use of psychoanalytic theory against itself – as a means of addressing the shortcomings inherent to the framework of the male gaze and other concepts. However, this approach to the analysis of masculinities remains firmly rooted in the recognition of representation by sorting male characters according to the preexisting concepts they signified or could be associated with. Even though Neale's work has led greater scholarly attention to masculinities and the analysis of

diverse types of masculinity, this methodology continues to function through the recognition of representation, which denies the vibrancy of cinematic form.

In subsequent work on masculinities that is critical of Mulvey, theorists remain committed to representation even if they take different positions on her theory's usefulness. For example, Peter Lehman argues for a more robust engagement with diverse representations of masculinities, and sees Mulvey's theory as limiting and restricting this type of analysis. "Mulvey oversimplified," argues Lehman, "both the history of the sexual representation of the male body and the nature of male subjectivity" (1993, 6). For Lehman, the framework of Mulvey's gaze theory diminished the manner in which male bodies are impacted by patriarchy and did not leave the space to identify how male subjectivities within popular narrative cinema can signify or be associated with varying positions of power. "Indeed, the important point is precisely that all penises are inadequate to the phallus," states Lehman, "that none of them can measure up to it" (1993, 10). Therefore, for Lehman, Mulvey's theoretical framework omits the experiences and anxieties that men encounter within patriarchal ideology, which he frames through a conceptualization of the phallus as an unachievable ideal. The phallus, for Lehman, not only represents male privilege and access to power within patriarchal ideology – which functions to marginalize the experiences of women and minorities – but it also can represent an ideal that perceives any manhood as always already insufficient. By identifying how representations of male characters can be associated with this understanding of the phallus, Lehman argues for a distinction between patriarchal structures and masculinities. Accordingly, patriarchal structures often favor masculinities, but they can also be detrimental to male subjectivities in diverse ways. However, despite Lehman's critique of Mulvey's work, he remains within the coordinates of her theory by relying on the recognition of representation to establish his analysis of masculinities in

cinema. My insistence, through Brinkema, on the close reading for form repositions the coordinates for analyzing masculinities within the singular potential unique to each film's taking shape, which no longer relies on representation or spectatorship as sites of significance.

Neo-formalist and cognitive modes of analysis take issue with psychoanalytic theory and representation and insist that the elements of film form are something actively engaged by the viewer. They are often viewed in opposition to psychoanalysis and other modes that identify the socio-cultural significance of films through representation. In light of this insistence on interpreting the elements of film form rather than connecting them to a socio-cultural representation, one might suspect that neo-formalist approaches could be adopted in a reading of masculinities as forms. However, I still see these two distinct approaches – neo-formalist/cognitive and psychoanalysis/representation – as related because each assumes films to be static and fixed, approaches that privilege the spectator as the site of meaning that denies difference. Bordwell's position on psychoanalysis and other representational modes (what is referred to as subject-position theory) takes issue with the assumption that the spectator is a passive site as opposed to an active, cognizing position. "Ideology thus manifests itself in representational systems," argues Bordwell, "which 'position' subjects. Representation creates the very ground of knowledge and experience" (1996, 14). For Bordwell, the subject-position theory does something to an ideal spectator that is impressed upon by the film. Conversely, a cognitive approach replaces the passive vessel of psychoanalysis (and other subject-position theories), the subject, with an active viewer that is able to test hypotheses and recognize filmic schemas. For Bordwell, there is a distinction in the subject-position theory, informed by psychoanalysis, between the subject and identity (or the individual). "The subject is the ground which renders meaning, difference, and pleasure possible. By contrast," argues Bordwell, "the individual or

person is an entity capable of entering the condition of subjecthood" (1996, 15). Bordwell's cognitive model counters the subject-position model, which he interprets as a person or individual entering a site (a subject position) where meaning, difference, and pleasure are acted upon them. In opposition, he proposes a psychological engagement where an individual is actively trying to understand and piece together the information and meaning within a film, which recognizes this activity as a possibly pleasurable experience for the viewer. However, although neo-formalists and cognitivists privilege the processing of cinematic form by an active viewer, this approach to cinematic form also denies difference by using a static set of motifs, cues, and schemas that are identified and put together. In this approach, the vibrancy of cinematic form remains restricted to the effects had on a viewer.

The post-theory movement articulated by neo-formalists and cognitivists against psychoanalysis and other models of representation is concerned primarily with how an individual can process cinematic form for narrative meaning and viewing pleasure as opposed to a close reading for forms as opening up speculation. In effect, they use a static model of form – motifs, cues, and schemas, among other concepts – to advocate for a different type of spectatorship. Their challenge to film theory is less a concern with cinematic form – and how its vibrant difference takes shape – and more with the defense of viewers that derive pleasure from thinking through a film's problems and scenarios. "Psychoanalytic theory tends to collapse the viewer's responses into a single dimension fed by primary process energy and the unresolved childhood traumas associated with it. Film theory," argues Stephen Prince, "needs to discard the kind of reactive and passive viewers who are built into theories of 'suture' and 'positioning' and, instead, place viewers within an altogether more rational, flexible, and multivalent context" (1996, 80). Prince articulates how the issue neo-formalists and cognitivists take with representational models

is the passive spectator position, and not cinematic form understood as fixed significations and associations. Therefore, in essence, all variations of these approaches read the effects of film form and content through the kinds of responses had by different types of spectators – passive or active. In terms of psychoanalysis, the spectator is a passive site where meaning is interpreted. Consequently, Mulvey argues "that psychoanalysis can be used to reveal the way in which conventions of narrative cinema are tailored to dominant masculine desire – that voyeuristic pleasure is built into the way a spectator reads film" (2009, 127). Notice she places the emphasis on a spectator interpreting a film, which becomes the starting point that neo-formalists and cognitivists use to build an oppositional theory. In terms of neo-formalist and cognitive approaches, the spectator is an active site that builds interpretations of a film's meaning. "Instead of a 'pure' text, understandable 'in itself,'" argues Bordwell, "we have a text that gains its effects only in relation to a body of norms, a set of schemas, and the processes that the spectator initiates" (2008, 149). Because, for these two approaches, there is always the possibility of a viewer reading, responding to, or cognizing the meaning of a film, I understand these two distinct approaches as related. Furthermore, because they both rely on spectators as responding to form and content – whether passive or active – neither approach provides the tools necessary to undertake a close reading of form.

Reading the Forms of Masculinities Through Brinkema's Radical Formalism

V. F. Perkins is an important interlocutor for his insistence on closely reading for forms. He outlines a film theory devoted to the close reading of film form and building interpretations through a substantial analysis of the style composed by a film, or filmmaker. Film form – in this sense, the way the components of a film come and work together – is a composition that

produces a recognizable characteristic within a single film or across a number of films, such as the work of an auteur. The vibrancy of cinematic form is illuminated in Perkins' approach because he acknowledges style as composed of potential – a series of choices made from among many options – which aligns with my view of genre films as sites full of energy and fervor. "Devices can be moulded into a style only when they have become inessential and," states Perkins, "in the most favourable sense, gratuitous. In any medium, style is formed by a pattern of decisions; but decisions can operate only where alternatives exist" (1993, 56). These decisions are made in the composition of film form, which can then be understood as producing a distinct style that differs through the pattern of decisions. Therefore, through Perkin's approach, even popular cinema cannot be simply dull repetitions of the same because any film – including films judged to have a poor or bare style – always take shape through a difference that is unique among the potential of alternative decisions. This insistence on style as molded through inessential devices – in terms of the film's plot – is a substantial claim because, without alternatives, cinematic form could not be read as the site where the vibrant intensities of affect or masculinities take shape, as cinematic form would simply be comprised of the only option available. Through my reading of Perkins' conceptualization of style, if the narrative structure of genre films always followed the same exact pattern – in terms of its general formulae level as well as at a moment-by-moment level – we could still read cinematic form as vibrant intensities because of the multiplicity of alternatives available within *mise-en-scène* and cinematography. This reading of cinematic form (rather than reading for forms) could include speculation that arises from different shot lengths, color palette, and blocking, among other possibilities, which compose popular films as stylistically different because films are never complete shot-for-shot remakes of each other even when they are categorized within the same genre. Every film radiates

as a result of vibrant intensities because cinematic form can always be read as singular, which take shape through unique circumstances rather than the mere repetition of the same.

While Perkins' theory offers pathways for thinking about the vibrancy of cinematic form, he still remains invested in the responses of spectators to film form as opposed to the reading for form as opening up speculation in the manner of Brinkema's radical formalism. For example, in Perkins' comparison of Alfred Hitchcock's two versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934, 1956), he notes how the original uses a close-up of a mother clutching her son's badge to emphasize her anxiety about his kidnapping, but, in comparison, the remake uses a different device that is developed before this scene takes place by connecting the son with the color red. Perkins sees the use of red in the remake as an alternative that "creates a more subtle effect" in comparison to the close-up on the badge in the original (ibid. 55). Where the child's association with the object – a badge – requires a close-up to show audiences that this is what the mother is clutching, the child's association with a color – red – does not require the same type of editing because red can be emphasized within the shot without cutting to stress any particular object. "The spectator does not have to *translate* the use of colour," argues Perkins, "as he must the use of the badge in order to be affected by it" (ibid. 56). Therefore, Perkins is less interested in reading the composition that takes shape and more interested in the effects of film form on spectators to create meaning. Nonetheless, this theory still insists that cinematic form is a vibrant intensity because it privileges the power of difference that is generated by relations. In particular, there is little to no distinction, for Perkins, between staged and real events recorded by the camera. "In this respect, the movie simply extends the ambiguity present in any credible image" argues Perkins; "so long as it looks correct we have no way of telling whether a picture portrays an actual or an imagined subject. The blurred distinction between authentic and staged events

helps to make the cinema a peculiarly vivid medium" (ibid. 68). Even through spectatorship, Perkins is drawing our attention to the vibrant intensities of cinematic form that offer filmmakers creative possibilities for making fictional worlds that capture the imagination of viewers.

Regardless of the intention of a filmmaker, I read this quality identified by Perkins as illuminating the potential to read cinematic form as dynamic processes of meaning because they are such vivid singularities that cannot be reduced to representation, signification, or association.

Meaning arises within cinematic form as a becoming, which emits forces that can be experienced as an effect, a feeling, a thought, or a response, but none of these experiences apprehend or read for forms as a dynamic process. Cinematic form remains primary – always before meaning – and the taking shape of reading for forms materializes as a vibrant intensity, which generates the realm of meaning through its radiation. Perkins' theory illuminates how cinematic forms constitute meaning because vital relations generate the conditions for reading for form. "What distinguishes film from other media, and the fiction movie from other forms," states Perkins, "is none of the elements but their combination, interaction, fusion" (ibid. 117). Therefore, in this sense, cinematic form is never static or fixed because it is a dynamic process of becoming as a singular event generated by a number of relations. Cinematic form is the merging, the mixing, and the intermingling of a multiplicity of elements within a moving image in which they meld as an event that affects any preconceived possibility of what any individual element might be understood to represent. There is a difference that arises between meaning attached to an element and meaning within cinematic forms, which Perkins' theory also acknowledges. "Meaning may exist without internal relationship;" states Perkins, "but coherence is the prerequisite of *contained* significance. By this I mean significance which we find within, rather than attached to, the form of the film" (ibid.). Therefore, for example, we might recognize that

Josephine's transition to Jo means or represents gender as performance, but, from Perkins' perspective, this is a type of significance attached to film form and content by sorting representations according to established categories or ideas. While Perkins is outlining a method for appreciating cinema through the experiences of a spectator, his attention to film form comprehends the capacity of cinematic form to generate meaning that arises as a result of internal relations composed by many elements and not an external meaning attached to a particular element or elements. In my close reading for forms, I embrace Perkins' insistence on film form as generating meaning through the fusion of many elements even if my method differs because I am less interested in the coherence of a film as grasped by a spectator that produces for them a general significance or a meaning to be understood.

More recently, Stella Bruzzi, like Perkins, turns to film form as a vivid source of significance for spectatorship, and specifically the way *mise-en-scène* produces notions of masculinity. Where Perkins is interested in a general appreciation and understanding of film that is sparked by formal relations, Bruzzi is interested in how the *mise-en-scène* and style of particular films – predominantly action films and thrillers – provide experiences of masculinity for male spectators. She defines these types of films as men's cinema because they foreground a visual style that is understood as signifying masculinity. Specifically, her notion of men's cinema is an exploration of "how, within Hollywood, masculinity is interpreted, understood and conveyed via aesthetics" (Bruzzi, 2013, 5). In Bruzzi's theory, meaning is determined in men's cinema as a visual experience that gives the spectator a type of affective, corporeal response, which she marks as masculine. In a discussion of Ethan's scaling of a skyscraper in *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol* (Bird 2010), for example, she observes that "The spectator is here placed, as in many other examples of 'men's cinema', in a position of a quasi-identification, not

so much with the hero as with the film's visual style" (ibid.). Bruzzi's notion of men's cinema interprets film form as a site that, through a corporeal signifying of masculinity, produces emotional responses in spectators, predominantly men, which are not directly dependent on the representations of male characters. This approach to film form and masculinities highlights the possibility of thinking beyond an insistence on representation, which, to reiterate, opens up the potential to think of masculinities as taking shape within cinematic form rather than masculinities as preexisting categories or definitions that the male characters of a film signify or not.

Even though Bruzzi's theory relies on spectatorship as a site where the effects of masculinities are experienced, her interpretation of film style as conveying masculinities acknowledges that cinematic form is not static and fixed. Moreover, by extension, her notion of men's cinema constructs a challenge to types of analysis that focus primarily or exclusively on the representation of masculinities. "These adrenalin-driven emotions are not simply the result of more conventionalised identification with the muscular hero, the figure of idealised masculinity on the screen" argues Bruzzi; "they are also responses – less intellectual, more instinctive, physical, visceral – shaped by a noticeable conjunction of stylistic elements" (ibid.). It is not identification with a hypermasculine action hero or a savvy detective alone that motivates a male spectator's response, for Bruzzi, but instead it is a kind of experience that stimulates the responses of male spectators. Accordingly, Bruzzi's theory positions film form as an alternative to representation. She tries, through her notion of men's cinema, to expand a narrow approach to examining masculinities and cinema, which is "namely that gender and sexual difference on screen are understood via the analysis of representation and image" (ibid. 8). Therefore, in a similar move to theorists like Thain and del Río as discussed in Chapter One, Bruzzi uses the

theoretical approaches of Shaviro and Sobchack – and, by extension, Deleuze – to frame an understanding of masculinities and form that takes on affective resonances and foregrounds a materialist theory of spectatorship (ibid. 14-16). However, Bruzzi's theory remains limited and restricted to spectatorship as the site where masculinities are experienced as a force by the bodies and minds of viewers, which acknowledges difference as an experience of the spectator and not within cinematic form. While I acknowledge Bruzzi's contribution to a discussion of masculinities and film form, my approach seeks to move away from the recognition of representation as well as spectatorship as an experience of difference in order to think through the masculinities as forms rather than conveyed to viewers by visual style.

Both Perkins and Bruzzi propose important challenges that push considerations of cinematic form beyond something that is taken to be static and fixed, but they also both remain committed to spectatorship within their theories. Conversely, Brinkema's theory is a timely and radical challenge within film theory as it revives the close reading for form, which has been overlooked in favor of interpreting the act of watching a film (spectatorship). In *The Forms of the Affects*, she confronts theories of affect by calling for a close reading of cinematic form and affect. Brinkema highlights how theorists that are inspired by the affective turn, as discussed in Chapter One, have a tendency to embrace a creative and ambiguous discourse of bodily responses as opposed to outlining a rigorous set of definitions and explanations of how affects take shape within moving images. This tendency that Brinkema critiques, one especially popular among Deleuzian theorists, is a strategy that seeks to open up the new and escape the constraints of scholarly writing – such as used by Thain, del Río, Shaviro, and Sobchack, among others. While a focus on the spectator in film theory and the inclination towards ambiguity in theories of affect can generate alternatives to modes of film theory that ignore the spectator's body,

Brinkema calls our attention to the consequences of these trends. By challenging dominant discourses within these fields, she opens up the capacity for rethinking affects in terms of cinematic form. Brinkema's text has the capacity to make any reader uncomfortable because she launches polemics against a number of theoretical positions and combines continental philosophical concepts with a sustained vigor not often found within film theory. The pathway she creates for reading for form in terms of affect rather than reading a viewer's experience of affect sparks my interest in her work. "I have written this book as a polemic," states Brinkema, "and thus I have chosen to write about formal affectivity in relation to texts that lure a critical response that ties affects either to narrative (narratives of grief; narratives of terror) or to spectatorial sensations or rumblings (a seemingly provoked disgust)" (Brinkema, 2014, 179). In her attempt to break through the tendencies of theorists writing on affect and film, Brinkema selects films with well-established critical reputations within the positions she seeks to counter. The theoretical diversity of her book provides her with a range of concepts that assist her in breaking through film theory's affinity for spectatorship as the site of meaning and debate, and which relies on binary logic. This is an approach I embrace in my analysis of masculinities as forms.

Brinkema applies pressure on the creative and ambiguous discourse of Deleuzian theories of affect and film, which, in turn, demands them to be more Deleuzian by reaffirming difference rather than relying on a discourse that has become static. In fact, Brinkema charges most works in film theory that embrace Deleuze and theories of affect as going against Deleuze's philosophy. "There is a formula for work on affect," states Brinkema, "and it turns on a set of shared terms: speed, violence, agitation, pressures, forces, intensities" (ibid. xiii). Because many of these works follow a similar pattern in their reaction against psychoanalytic film theory and representation in

order to assert the visceral connections between spectator and image, Brinkema finds them to be recycling similar claims. In a polemical style that is consistent throughout her book, Brinkema boldly claims that, "against much of the spirit of Deleuze's philosophy, which celebrated the minor, the changeable, and the multiple, Deleuzian theories of affect offer all repetition with no difference" (ibid.). While some Deleuzian theories of affect have more capacities than Brinkema grants them, her charge is one that must be addressed by any future exploration of cinema by Deleuzian theories of affect yet to come. The polemic results in more than a split. One can agree with Brinkema that Deleuzian theories of affect are repetitive and too ambiguous, and one can disagree with her and defend the creative discourse that refuses to reterritorialize in a reading of cinematic form. However, Brinkema pushes further in her attack on Deleuzian theories of affect as she ventures back through Deleuze, as well as Spinoza, to open up the capacity of affect in relation to a reading for forms. Rather than simply taking a side (for or against Deleuze), Brinkema makes a more profound contribution to film theory and theories of affect by introducing a new line of thought as an alternative mode that reinvigorates a Deleuzian discourse she reads as stagnant and redundant. My analysis in Chapters Three and Four, as well as my previous discussion of *The Big Lebowski* and *The Ballad of Little Jo*, seizes the challenge posed by Brinkema to the established thought of film theory in order to launch my own speculation about masculinities through the close reading of cinematic form.

In the ten points that structure her preface, Brinkema maps a series of questions, concerns, and goals that constitute in and of themselves an important contribution to theories of affect. Motivated by what she perceives as a lack of formal analysis and an overwhelming focus on the subject and spectatorship, she takes film theory to task in order to set up a return to form. A renewed focus on cinematic form has radical consequences for film theory and Deleuzian

theories of affect alike. "This book's insistence on the formal dimension of affect allows not only for specificity," states Brinkema, "but for the wild and many fecundities of specificity: difference, change, the particular, the contingent (*and*) the essential, the definite, the distinct, all dense details, and—again, to return to the spirit of Deleuze—the minor, inconsequential, secret, atomic" (ibid. xv). Brinkema's approach embraces difference in itself – as Deleuze outlines – through the analysis of the specificity and particularity of each event as a dynamic process, which I follow to inform my own readings of masculinities as forms. Following her insistence on reading a formal dimension as a means for developing new thinking about affects and cinema, I also insist on cinematic form as a means of opening up speculation that explores new conceptions of masculinities not tied to static definitions and fixed sets of characteristics.

"Treating affect in such a way," argues Brinkema, "deforms any coherence to 'affect' in the singular, general, universal and transforms it into something not given in advance, not apprehendable except through the thickets of formalist analysis" (ibid.). Therefore, and in a similar vein, my close readings of masculinities as forms ruptures a binaristic logic – that frames masculinity as masculinity or not masculinity – by refusing to sort masculinities according to a preexisting set of categories or ideals. Instead, masculinities are transformed as difference in all dense details of the specific circumstances and relations through which they take shape. One of the foremost issues Brinkema takes with Deleuzian and other cinematic theories of affect is the methods they employ to discuss affect in relation to film because they seem to continuously defer and deny any particular or unique assertions in favor of an ambiguous discourse that posits a multiplicity of openings, fragments, undoings, lines of flight, and becomings. While this ambiguous discourse embraces aspects of Deleuze's philosophy and generates many thought-provoking impressions, the prescribed processes that have begun to concretize within this

discourse mimic precisely the initial, stagnant discourse (mainly psychoanalytic film theory and other representational models) that theories of affect sought to unravel. Therefore, whether or not one fully agrees with Brinkema's charge against Deleuzian and other cinematic theories of affect, one of the most important contributions *The Forms of the Affects* makes to Deleuzian and affective film theory is a well-structured challenge to ongoing practices.

Brinkema's theory crucially sets her sights on a key concept within the Deleuzian arsenal: force. Theories of affect, especially Deleuzian lineages, tend to embrace force and forces as an integral component of affect, if not taking force to be the component that comprises affect altogether. Affects are forces. However, Brinkema does not simply accept this relation between affect and force. To investigate this relation, Brinkema seeks to map where force and affect interconnect in order to think through the concept of force in relation to the analysis of film. Within her book, she argues "that *it is only because one must read for it that affect has any force at all*" (ibid. 38). This claim is radical because she is arguing for a close reading of affects in forms as opposed to an interpretation that involves feeling affect, which launches a shift away from the current tendency within studies of cinematic affect that focuses on the theorist's, or spectator's, body towards an engagement with cinematic form. Brinkema's insistence on close reading is another important contribution to my approach because this counters the visceral discourses of Deleuzian and phenomenological theories of affect that assert cinematic sensations are felt by the body in response to a film. "The intensity of that force," states Brinkema, "derives from the textual specificity and particularity made available uniquely through reading" (ibid.). There is a push away from the spectator and towards moving images that stresses formal analysis, but Brinkema does not restrict what is used to do the reading. We may feel and we may see film form; nonetheless, we must decipher what generates this feeling and seeing. By reading

the formal processes that affect and are affected as opposed to identifying the feeling and seeing incurred by a spectator, Brinkema urges us to embrace "the vitality of all that is not known in advance of close reading, the surprising enchantments of the new that are not uncovered by interpretation but produced and brought into being as its activity" (ibid.). This is an embrace of the unique circumstances of production that occur through reading for form and not a procedure that notices and identifies static and fixed elements, such as motifs. Furthermore, this production does not occur as a different feeling, sensation, or perspective within a spectator, but instead flourishes through the mapping of specificities within cinematic form. Therefore, while Deleuzian affect theorists speak about generalities in relation to feelings generated by cinematic sensations, the mapping of the formal dimension of affect creates the capacity to delve into "difference, change, the particular, the contingent (*and*) the essential, the definite, the distinct, all dense details" (ibid. xv). In other words, Brinkema pushes us to encounter what occurs within moving images (a similar push made by Perkins), which takes shape between affect and cinematic form rather than recording the effects that cinematic affect has upon our bodies, our minds, and our subjectivities.

This positioning of force in relation to close reading triggers an implicit question raised by Brinkema's text: what is affect? To build on the discussion of affect from Chapter One, it is necessary to more closely examine affect in relation to a Deleuzian conceptualization of force in order to develop my reading of Brinkema as contributing to a conceptualization of masculinities as form and as creative force. Although theories of affect have infiltrated most fields within the Humanities and social sciences (as discussed in Chapter One), the plural (theories of affect) is preferred to the singular (affect theory) because of the discrepancies across the conceptualization of affect. Furthermore, some theoretical lineages, especially Deleuzian modes, uphold a distinct

conceptual ambiguity that allows for a multiplicity of creative applications. However, mapping important theorists within the field of Deleuzian theories of affect generates an important and much needed conceptualization of affect that reveals even more potential with or beyond Brinkema's text. For instance, del Río provides a useful conceptualization of affect through a discussion of Massumi and Spinoza. "Affect in this sense is not a discrete emotion," del Río states, "but rather a transitional event that marks the passage from one state of the body to another, thus bringing about a diminution or augmentation of the body's powers" (2016, 3). Following del Río's statement, affect is understood as in-between bodies – here del Río seems to suggest a human body, but I read body as encompassing a diverse range of assemblages, including nonhumans, objects, ideas, and discourses. Consequently, within the in-between of bodies is the realm of affect. "Affect is a qualitative experience that is felt," states del Río, "even while it may not be consciously registered. The concept of affect is inseparable from the body's immersion in an 'open field of relations'—open because the virtual potentials may at any time be on the verge of actualization" (ibid.). For my purposes, del Río provides an important visualization of a multiplicity of bodies within relations that are capable of movement and rest. It is this movement and rest, speed and slowness, which Deleuzian theories of affect posit as unfolding as bodies that come together to affect and be affected by other bodies.

The forces of these in-between relations within the spaces occupied by any composition of bodies are able to alter bodies and express the new. Forces launch the potential for differing. Difference – in terms of my reading of Deleuze – is the production of affects that generate the specificity and particularity of things and sustain the dynamic processes of their becoming. Correspondingly, affect and difference are intimately bound together, or, as del Río succinctly states, "affect is indivisible from transformation and experimentation" (ibid.). Nevertheless,

Brinkema's claim that the forces of affect develop through the close reading for form will appear misguided unless we confront del Río's assertion that affect and alteration are united. Although some approaches within theories of affect might object to the claim, Gregg and Seigworth also read affects and forces as related. "Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*" (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, 2). We may posit, for now, that affect causes bodies to alter, change, transform, mutate, or transition, and that bodies undergo these processes because of the forces of encounter, or affect. However, this claim does not seem adequate to the task of conceptualizing affect. Affect does not all of a sudden appear in-between two bodies in order to exert some altering spell upon everything within reach. Instead, affect can be grasped as the force that arises when bodies interconnect, come into contact, embrace, or enter into some form of relation. Therefore, affects indicate the potential for and of relations, and the force that they generate. "Affects do not bring about the transformation of one body into another," argues Keith Ansell-Pearson, "but rather something passes from one to the other " (1999, 179). There would be no affect without bodies, but there would also be no bodies without affect. Within the field of existence, bodies persist because they continuously enter into relations, which unfold the new as affects that are endlessly generated in-between bodies. A body that remains forever stagnant, unaffected, is a body that ceases to have power and, eventually, no longer perseveres.

A body's power is increased by its capacity to affect and be affected, which requires entering into relations with other bodies in order to transform and experiment. These relations exist within an open field because the potentialities of alterations yet to come subsist virtually, which is to say they have the potential to emerge but they are not yet actual. By entering into relations, a body can grasp some of the affective force that remains virtual. Brian Massumi provides pathways into the virtual realm of potentials and affect. "Affects are *virtual synesthetic*

perspectives," states Massumi, "anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them" (2002, 35). Their force, or the force of the affects, is apprehended in the yet to come, in the open, in multiplicity of potentialities that could actualize through any encounter. "The autonomy of affect," states Massumi, "is its participation in the virtual. *Its autonomy is its openness*. Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is" (ibid.). If there is one possibility for dividing affect from transformation and experimentation, it is within the virtual (the open) because it is in this realm that affect is never yet transformation and experimentation, and only transformation and experimentation yet to come. Affect links with transformation and experimentation within the actual where its forces become productions by bodies entering into relations. "Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions," states Massumi, "fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect" (ibid.). Nevertheless, affects remain autonomous because there are always new relations between bodies that will unfold more of what is yet to come. Therefore, following Brinkema, I do not simply read cinematic form as static and fixed because that would be to assume that reading for form has no force at all. Affects are captured and closed – no longer generating what is yet to come – when something is already associated with a meaning, or when something is already interpreted as representing an established significance. Instead, reading masculinities as form is to acknowledge the dynamic processes that are forming, shaping, and structuring with a force that illuminates the unique circumstances of differing that can create new concepts.

When a body affects or is affected by another body, it involves an actual alteration of the two bodies. As Massumi outlines, when something impinges on the body, that which impinges is not infolded by the body, but something, or rather some force, is taken in as the body infolds the

intensity of the something without the action or context that brought it to bear on the body. "This is a first-order idea produced spontaneously by the body: the affection is immediately, spontaneously doubled by the repeatable trace of an encounter," states Massumi, "the 'form' of an encounter, in Spinoza's terminology" (ibid. 32). It is Massumi's use of form from Spinoza that gives us a pathway back to Brinkema and actualizes the radical potentialities of her theory as well as my approach that reads masculinities as forms. When an event occurs, like the formation of a footprint, we can read that footprint as a sign that a foot left an impression within a surface. However, left out of this consideration is the force between bodies – the foot and the surface. That is to say, the force that remains ever invisible between surface and foot – which is invisible before, during, and after the appearance of the footprint – that always already remains as the necessary force, the intensity, the affect that marks the capacity for transformation and the transformation itself. In short, recognizing the footprint as a sign of the foot is to ignore affect. The footprint can also be read as the infolding of the intensity that actualized in-between the relation entered into by the surface and the foot as relations forming. Therefore, as radical as Brinkema's call to read for the forms of the affects may be, from another perspective, her claim maps a Spinozist line back into theories of affect to expose what was already there: the form of the encounter. To reiterate, bringing Brinkema's theory to bear on masculinities and cinematic form generates a pathway for my analysis to map masculinities in their specificity and particularity as dynamic processes.

Perhaps it is possible to take this speculation a step further to argue that motion images allow a privileged access to relations between bodies as they unfold. If this is possible, then it is also possible to speculate that there is the potential to observe the materiality of the site upon which affects emerge from the virtual in any moment whatsoever. Affect is indivisible from

transformation and experimentation, such as the experimentation that brought the foot towards the surface and the transformation of the footprint within that surface. At the same time, the affect, as the force that was infolded and transformed the surface, does not remain within the surface or the footprint, or even the foot. However, the footprint (the transformed surface) does offer us a glimpse of *virtual synesthetic perspectives* that gave it form. In other words, it provides us with a glimpse of affect as partially or momentarily captured in the midst of an ongoing process. "Our existence is always bound up," argues Shaviro, "with affective and aesthetic flows that elude cognitive definition or capture" (2010, 4). These flows often converge, especially within motion images, and, despite their ability to avoid detection and constraint, they leave behind their trace within the cinematic forms that alter and experiment as a result of their encounter. Therefore, Brinkema's theory is not simply a take on affect and form, as del Río claims (2016, 233-34); rather, it is an intervention, a challenge, and a text that must be reckoned with again and again. "Forms alone do not express the totality of an event," states del Río, "and only at the level of their articulation can affects be identified with forms. An analysis of affects must begin with forms, but forms that continually change precisely because they are also forces" (2016, 233). But this form that is also a force cannot only be displaced onto the body of the spectator, where it is radiating force that gives an experience of difference. To reiterate, cinematic form is a force because it is never static and fixed, and, instead, always a vibrant intensity that must be closely read as it unfolds its specificity and particularity – the unique circumstances as each event that relates to another.

Brinkema unfolds a profound and charged formalism, which I use to launch my own analysis of masculinities because her theory calls attention to the particular, to difference, to the wild, to the new, the dense details, and that which remains indivisible from the affects: the forms.

Although the world may not pause long enough for us to grasp the particulars of form as it is in a constant state of becoming, cinematic images – especially within our current digital era where we have increased interactivity with motion images – offer us an astonishing potential: the ability to stop and replay. This potential also generates an increased capacity for reading closely and cinematic form – primarily, the *mise-en-scène*, the cinematography, and the editing – as an alternative site that captures force. Thus, cinematic form within the image and the forms of the image are both sites that can be read for affect, which can open up the forces that transform and experiment within motion images. Therefore, if we consider masculinities as forms as well as creative force, then they can be read for as dynamic processes that are composed of relations, expressed through relation, and altered with the emergence of new relations. Brinkema outlines how her theoretical "approach requires beginning with the premise that affective force works over form, that forms are auto-affectively charged, and that affects take shape in the details of specific visual forms and temporal structures" (2014, 37). Therefore, if masculinities are creative force, then, following Brinkema, I am able to read their becoming as working over cinematic form as dynamic processes that take shape within moving images in all their difference as specificity and particularity. To reiterate, masculinities, in my approach, deforms any notion of masculinity as singular, general, universal, essential, or normative, and transforms it into something that must be read for rather than categorized or sorted according to what is already known.

Forces arise through production as forms take shape, which is realized and actualized by reading. Without reading the formal dimensions of moving images, forces remain subject to the requirements of representation that subordinate difference. "Taking forms and affects as mutually consequent, reading for their shaping of each other," states Brinkema, "instructs us in a

lesson about the possibility for the new, the not-yet vitality of both form and affectivity. It is a lesson that reading for affect uniquely teaches, and that reading, indeed, makes possible and creates – because interpretation itself is also always infinite" (ibid. 261). In this sense, reading is the production of forces that infold on what is known in the creation of the new, the unthought, and the not yet. Moreover, this infolding can augment, reimagine, and construct concepts within established theoretical discourses – specifically, established discourses of masculinities studies as discussed in my dissertation – through the force that a close reading for form as a speculative exercise opens up. Therefore, Brinkema calls our attention to the necessity of reading for affect as the only way for it to have any force at all because reading, and reading alone, generates the showing of differing. As I have demonstrated, this does not involve the tracing or recognizing of elements as already attached with meaning, which uses significance and association to sort something assumed to be static and fixed. Reading is to risk a journey without a guide and to make one's own map within the dynamic processes of becoming. Consequently, to read masculinities as forms is to seize the unique experience of each event as it takes shape within cinematic form and to use this formal analysis to speculate how the unique circumstances in their specificity and particularity might configure or structure or shape new concepts. In the two chapters that follow, I undertake this type of speculative exercise in order to engage established masculinities studies discourses in relation to the Western (Chapter Three) and the masculine crisis film (Chapter Four). My approach does not seek to replicate Brinkema's method in *The Forms of the Affects*, but, as I have outlined in this chapter and also grounding my analysis in the insights established in Chapter One, I use her theory as a means of generating my own pathway for reading masculinities as forms.

- CHAPTER THREE -

The Western Genre: Masculinities as a Force of Relations

"His disposition is a given, which is why we admire our cowboy hero."

- Mary Lea Bandy & Kevin Stoehr, *Ride, Boldly Ride*, 2.

"Since I was 14 years old, I always wore cowboy boots. Maybe because my little boy role models were always the men in the black hats. Richard Boone in *Have Gun – Will Travel*, Robert Vaughn in *The Magnificent Seven*. 'Silent Killers.' Men with pasts. Men from somewhere else who found themselves in the great American West. A place where reinvention, a new life was always possible. As long as you were willing to kill for it."

- Anthony Bourdain, "New Mexico," *Anthony Bourdain Parts Unknown*, 2.3.

Stark: Unforgiven (Eastwood 1992)

Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, about the former gunfighter turned farmer William Munny, is perhaps the most renowned Western from the genre's revival in the early 1990s. The myths of frontier masculinity are the focus of the film's narrative as Munny and other characters struggle with the toxic characteristics of myths they cannot escape – it is in this sense that they remain unforgiven. This representation of unforgiving masculinity is evident in Kimmel's identification of Clint Eastwood's character as signifying "the embodiment of remorseless manhood" (2006, 213). In this interpretation of *Unforgiven*, Munny represents the brutal masculinity that is commonly associated with the Western, which is epitomized in gunfighting, killing, whiskey drinking, womanizing and abuse, revenge, lawlessness, and a general selfishness that disregards the well-being of others in the pursuit of an individualist goal of wealth and pleasure. However, we could attach remorseless manhood to any number of characters in the film as well as the history of the Western genre. From Little Bill in *Unforgiven* to Eastwood's role as the Stranger in *High Plains Drifter* (Eastwood 1973) to the men in *The Wild Bunch* (Peckinpah 1969) to Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* (Ford 1956) to Ben Stride in *7 Men from Now* (Boetticher 1956) to

Frank Miller in *High Noon* (Zinnemann 1952) to Judge Roy Bean in *The Westerner* (Wyler 1940), as well as many more villains and heroes, examples of remorseless manhood are plentiful. The commonality across all of these men, no matter if they are portrayed as heroic or evil, is their capability to kill without regret, which fosters a relentless violence. Nevertheless, these examples of frontier masculinity are all different, as some of these men are stopped with the bullet of a hero and die villains, while others die in heroic fashion in a flurry of gunfire, and a few, as in *High Plains Drifter* and *The Searchers*, ride off into the sunset or at least out of town after restoring order through violence. Consequently, a number of these characters are redeemed and their violence viewed as heroic. For Kimmel, this is not the case in *Unforgiven* because the film is "a countermyth, a story of manhood retrieved without redemption, without heroism" (ibid.). In comparison, violent men such as Shane in *Shane* (Stevens 1953), Howard Kemp in *The Naked Spur* (Mann 1953), Morg in *The Tin Star* (Mann 1957), the Elder brothers in *The Sons of Katie Elder* (Hathaway 1965), and J. B. Brooks in *The Shootist* (Siegel 1976), among others, receive redemption and are acknowledged as heroes by their peers. That being said, William Munny appears to be much more ruthless and violent than any of these other examples of violent westerners because, as is oft repeated throughout the film, he has killed women and children, which violates the code of gunfighting, like shooting an unarmed man or a man in the back. Munny has a penchant for violence that he is unable to contain no matter his efforts to reform. However, in spite of what Kimmel identifies as remorseless manhood, Munny does show some physical signs of remorse for his actions and he appears committed to the memory of his wife in an attempt to relegate his violent ways to the past. In the discussion of *Unforgiven* that follows, I map interpretations of the film that rely on binaristic logic and the recognition of

representation in order to build towards my own reading of masculinities in the film as a stark form.

Kimmel suggests that Munny must retrieve his masculinity – "a story of manhood retrieved" – through violence, but these violent acts, despite intentions to provide for his children and to bring justice to Delilah and the other sex workers of Big Whiskey, do not liberate him or make him a hero, in Kimmel's interpretation. Just like the Schofield Kid showing up at his homestead, Munny's past seems destined to catch up with him no matter how he attempts to reform himself. "Finally, William Munny embraces the world of the unforgiven," states Patrick McGee, "with the full realization that he can never repair the damage he has done or find forgiveness" (2007, 198). No matter the pressure that is exerted by Munny's will, his wife Claudia's memory, or other forces within the film, he is unable to undo his unpleasant, murderous actions – past, present, and future. Thus, his final entrance into the saloon in Big Whiskey, to revenge Ned's death, is read by McGee as the retrieving of his manhood by accepting his violence and drinking, which he has tried to disavow throughout the entire film. "Emboldened by hard liquor," Matthew Carter argues, "Munny's masculinity has now been fully restored and, as he stands at the front door of the saloon, his shotgun symbolically erects in the foreground of the frame" (2014, 149). Through Carter's use of psychoanalytic theory, Munny's gun signifies the phallic, virile position that he now asserts only days after being nearly beaten to death by Little Bill within the same saloon. Carter might read this beating as signifying emasculation. Masculinity is understood as something that he had, in terms of his reputation as a gunfighter, and then lost when he settled down and his wife cured him of his whiskey drinking, but then he regained this manhood through the course of the film by killing, drinking, and looking to kill again without remorse. This is what manhood is, according to the conventions of

the Western as discussed in these interpretations, and toughness, whiskey, guns, and violence all denote it.

Yet, there are other interpretations that approach Munny's heroism differently. In his extended reading of the film, Edward Buscombe distinguishes between an outlaw, savage violence – as enacted by Little Bill and others – and a legitimated violence that can establish civilization. Buscombe states, "paradoxically, law and order can only be achieved through the application of necessary violence, a violence that, unlike the brutality of outlaws and savages, is legitimated and, to use Richard Slotkin's term, regenerative" (2004, 19). Buscombe goes on to frame legitimated and regenerative violence as necessary to combat the unruliness of the frontier as a space between wilderness and civilization. The frontier then contains different types of violence, which can be viewed as wild and savage when enacted for the wrong reasons, or as lawful and necessary when it brings about justice and order. While Buscombe's articulation of this difference appears satisfactory within the generic discourse on the Western, there remains a common set of ideals among the perpetrators of both brutal and regenerative violence. However, and in contrast to Kimmel, Buscombe does see Munny as the embodiment of heroism in *Unforgiven* in accordance with other Western heroes that bring peace and justice to a community through violence. "The violence which they deal out is sanctioned," states Buscombe, because "its application allows peace to flourish, even though the man who administers it may not always, because of his albeit temporary regression to a more primitive state, find a place for himself within the order he has established" (ibid.). Consequently, Munny is interpreted as embodying a heroic masculinity precisely because his violence can be associated with regenerative violence, which brings the community what it needs – in this case, the purging of

Little Bill, Skinny, and other evil men – and his departure represents the possibility of regeneration as the last vestige of frontier masculinity is negated.

Buscombe's interpretation of masculinity in the film is at odds with Kimmel's, which is perhaps explained by the fact that Buscombe is a Western film scholar and Kimmel is merely discussing the film in relation to a general discourse of American manhood. This knowledge of the Western film genre provides support for Buscombe's analysis of *Unforgiven*. "At the end of *Shane*, as in *Unforgiven*," he states, "the hero, having killed his man, retreats from the community he has cleansed of evil and withdraws into the obscurity whence he came" (ibid. 32). Buscombe makes a connection between Shane and Munny, even though the two men are quite different representations of frontier masculinity, because both heroes serve a similar purpose: to use regenerative violence to rid a community of evil. Therefore, the manhood Kimmel understands to be remorseless and without heroism, Buscombe champions as an integral representation of heroic masculinity in the Western, which aligns with the conventions of the genre. Andrew Patrick Nelson supports Buscombe's position on Munny's violence as regenerative in his own discussion of *Unforgiven*. "Avenging, cleansing violence," states Nelson, "is required when the institutions of society prove to be wrongheaded or corrupt" (2013, 19). Therefore, through Buscombe and Nelson, it is apparent that the frontier communities of the Western genre require a frontier masculinity that is remorseless, even brutally violent and vengeful, because there is so much evil and corruption in need of purging. The difference between Munny and other men in the film, such as Little Bill or English Bob, as well as between Munny and other Western heroes, appears to be only a matter of degree. All of these men are more than willing to kill – especially with the addition of a little whiskey – but only Munny doubles back for the memory of a friend after already receiving the reward, he is the only man

who does not take "free ones" from the sex workers, and he is the only man to say enough is enough to the autocratic sheriff even though he can ride away without confrontation. In short, Munny is redeemed, from the position of Buscombe and Nelson, as the representation of a hero even if his actions remain unforgiven, which is contrary to Kimmel's interpretation.

If there is any doubt in Munny's representation as a hero, if we follow Buscombe and Nelson, it only arises because Munny appears to lack the ability to provide the justice that Big Whiskey needs. This doubt is cast in a way that recalls Tom Destry, Jr. in *Destry Rides Again* (Marshall 1939) and even Dan Evans in *3:10 to Yuma* (Daves 1957). Whether it is the poor conditions the Kid finds Munny living in, his struggle to get on his horse and hit targets with his gun, his falling ill on the path to Big Whiskey, or the beating he takes from Little Bill when confronted in the saloon upon their initial arrival, Munny does not appear to be the man he once was nor does he appear capable of recovering and embodying the frontier masculinity that is necessary to execute the regenerative violence Big Whiskey requires. However, unlike English Bob or Little Bill, who are ultimately exposed as mere myths because they are unable to act in a way that validates their reputations, Munny makes good, but not without his stumbles – including a shotgun round that misfires in his final confrontation with Little Bill. Thus, *Unforgiven*, according to Buscombe, "debunks a mythologised west, but ultimately reasserts the mystique of the hero" (2004, 53). Munny may not appear to live up to the myth, but his actions, in the end, more than make up for it. Nevertheless, this interpretation of Munny's masculinity as heroic depends on spectators as a site of meaning, which is conferred through binaristic logic. "And so we are not surprised, indeed are even gratified," states Buscombe, "that having worked against the founding myth of the Western for most of its length, that strong and just men must use violence to impose order and civilisation, in the last reel *Unforgiven* reverts to tradition. If

ever a film had its cake and ate it too, surely this is it" (ibid. 75). In this sense, the myths of frontier masculinity are exposed throughout the film as fallacy – for example, English Bob's stories exposed by Little Bill as fabrications – and vicious – Munny is known to have murdered women and children. Yet, this same frontier masculinity – with all its brutal violence – is represented as necessary in the end, but only if we accept Munny's violence, in this instance, as regenerative. Despite the tension between outlaw and regenerative violence, which pulls within the representation of frontier masculinity embodied by Munny, Buscombe appears content with this interpretation as stated through cliché: it has its cake and eats it, too. What is in operation within Buscombe's interpretation is a binaristic logic that struggles to account for Munny's masculinity as not masculinity, which is what my dissertation generates and this requires an engagement with the forms taking shape within the events of the film rather than attaching meaning to the elements of the narrative – as distinguished in my discussion of Perkins in chapter two.

Considering the fact that Munny is not simply a reformed outlaw – he is "a known thief and murderer, a man of notoriously vicious and intemperate disposition," according to the narration that scrolls through the opening of the film – Kimmel's claim that Munny is without heroism is also a matter of degree. Like Buscombe and Nelson, who interpret Munny as enacting regenerative violence, understanding Munny's masculinity as a representation without heroism can only occur if binaristic logic is used to distinguish between what counts as signifying heroism and what does not. Conversely, against Kimmel's interpretation, if *Unforgiven* is a critique of the Western genre through demythologization, then Munny represents heroism through the acceptance that frontier masculinity is brutal and unforgiveable, which leaves him unforgiven and simultaneously a necessary part of civilization's emergence because he is willing

to use his frontier masculinity to purge evil from the community. This also requires the acknowledgment that men embracing the codes of frontier masculinity can become heroic only if they kill other evil men, which aligns with the position of Buscombe and Nelson on regenerative masculinity. Conversely, following Kimmel, as well as McGee's claim that Munny accepts that he can never be forgiven, the final shootout in *Big Whiskey* is the return of the same remorseless masculinity that is sustained by a vicious and intemperate disposition. While these two perspectives are at odds, it appears neither exercise in oppositional logic offers a definitive interpretation nor do they offer us insight into the unique circumstances of the film as difference.

If Munny's murderous actions are interpreted as bringing about peace and justice to *Big Whiskey*, then it is surely a personal type of peace and justice that connotes Munny's self-indulgence through the reassertion of his manhood. While Buscombe and Nelson make a case for Munny's actions as an example of regenerative violence, the whiskey-drinking outlaw that walks into the saloon at the end of the film is different only in degree from Mike, who cut Delilah's face when she emasculated him by giggling at his "teensy pecker" because Munny's actions can be interpreted as a retrieval of his manhood. "Ambitious, compelling, but finally flawed," Kitses states, "Eastwood's critique of the Western as a genre sustained by masculine codes of violence is itself all too satisfyingly sustained by that same violence" (2004, 312). Through Kitses' interpretation of the film's conclusion, it is evident that Munny's actions support frontier masculinity's same penchant for violence that has been routinely demythologized throughout the film. Therefore, despite the fact that all of these cowboy heroes are exposed as varied embodiments of violent drunks, Munny's questionable past is never really the issue. The issue that the film works to resolve is the loss and recovery of Munny's manhood because, as Carter points out, it is only his entering of the saloon that restores his masculinity in all its drunkenness

and ferocity. For some, this violence is regenerative and it signifies heroism, but for others this is a remorseless manhood and a countermyth without a hero. In all these interpretations, the film's representations are sorted through binary choices into notions that understand masculinity as general, singular, and universal.

No matter how Munny's representation of masculinity and violence is sorted – as regenerative and heroic or as an outlaw type without heroism – no association offers an indisputable categorization. Instead, the recognition of representation offered by these interpretations uses oppositional logic to connect and associate elements of *Unforgiven*, as static and fixed, with preexisting notions of masculinity, the Western, and the frontier. Through this representational analysis that uses binaristic logic, Munny is categorized as a representation of masculinity or not masculinity, a hero or not a hero, redeemed or not redeemed for his past brutality, and as an embodiment of remorseless manhood or not. To get beyond binary logic to open up perspectives, in what follows I turn to the theoretical methodology developed throughout the first two chapters in order to read the forms of masculinities in *Unforgiven* for their ineluctably specific complexity – recalling Brinkema – rather than interpreting how the representations of masculinity fit preexisting binary choices. Therefore, if masculinities have form and inhere in cinematic form, as is my contention, then *Unforgiven* is a stark form that takes on a structural relation to the frontier, which makes unpleasantly clear the bare appearances and severe outcomes of frontier masculinity.

"Jesus, I am so thirsty," cries Davey as he lays gut-shot behind a rock after Munny, the Kid, and Ned's ambush. Carter notes that this scene "is both protracted and painful to watch" (2014, 142), but this significance is understood through the effects it has on an assumed spectator. In terms of the scene's vibrant intensities, it unfolds a stark form that is configured by

unpleasantness, and it is also structured through the incapacity of movement. Huddled within a rock formation stripped of most vegetation – a bare appearance – Ned, with Munny and the Kid, fires a shot with his Spencer rifle that takes down Davey's horse as he is chasing a calf, which leads to the horse falling onto Davey's leg and triggering a severe break. This grows into an increasingly vexatious situation for all the men involved in the standoff – including Munny, Ned, and the Kid as well as the other cowboys with Davey and Mike (the targets of the bounty hunters). With his leg severely fractured and trapped under the horse, Davey becomes incapable of much movement and, as he struggles, the other cowboys take shelter behind rocks and urge him to do the same. Meanwhile, the Kid, due to his poor eyesight, asks repeatedly if they killed him and for clarification about the situation, but Ned and Munny are stiff and rigid in response to his demands. The scene unfolds experiences of annoyance, frustration, and worry for all involved.

As Ned watches, Davey struggles and digs his fingers into the sand in an effort to pull his body to safety in spite of the stark circumstances in which he finds himself. The current situation, and the reaffirmation of his outlaw ways with Munny, suddenly becomes too unpleasant for Ned to bear. With Davey struggling to escape the hostile situation – much like the calf that struggled free of the cowboys' clutches and which Davey followed in pursuit, putting his horse into the path of a bullet – Ned admits to Munny that he cannot shoot Davey. There is no quick kill to be had. Initially, Davey struggles with his severely fractured leg trapped under the horse, then he manages to get free and slowly claw his way across the sand towards cover as Ned relinquishes the rifle to Munny with the Kid demanding to know what is going on and why they have not killed Davey. Munny fires his first shot, which misses. He waits, asking Ned how many shots he has left, but Ned is stiff and unable to respond. "Ned, goddamit, how many more shots do I

have?" asks Munny, remaining rigid in relation to the task amidst the situation. When the first of two remaining shots also misses, Munny works the lever to load the last round into the chamber as this situation threatens to have a starker outcome that would require Munny, the Kid, and Ned to go down there to finish the job. However, Munny's last shot with the Spencer rifle hits Davey in the stomach, which does not instantly kill him and leaves all the other men unable to avoid his cries in agony as he slowly dies. Unable to withstand Davey's pleading for water that goes unanswered, Munny exclaims, "Give him some water, godammit!" There has been a lot of talk about killing people up to this point, but no one has mentioned what it is like to experience a person dying in front of you as a result of a bullet.

This extended experience of Davey's final, suffering moments weighs heavy on Ned, but also to some extent on Munny, who does not relish the murder. The Kid, at this point, seems unscathed as he shouts back at Davey's cries, "Well, then, you shouldn't have cut up no woman, you asshole." The structure of this scene remains immobile throughout – that is, the characters in the scene remain in one place – as the film cuts back and forth from the position of the Kid, Ned, and Munny to the various positions of the cowboys as well as Davey and back again. There is no chase or dramatic gunfight. Instead, there is a young person with a broken leg who crawls through the sand in fear for his life until a bullet eventually hits him in the gut. He cries in pain and in thirst. He dies. Without whiskey to dull the senses, Munny experiences the full duration of this moment in all its intensity, which also breaks Ned's will to continue the job and finish the killing. However, Munny is steadfast in his disposition, despite the affective death of Davey, as if the death of the other cowboy, Mike, is impossible to avoid because he must purge the men perceived as evil from civilization. This entire scene that grows around Davey's death is shaped by an unpleasantness that cannot be avoided, which marks the severe outcome of violence and

murder in the form of a young person's pleading for water as he takes his last breaths. This same unpleasantly clear reality will catch up with the Kid soon after, when he and Munny ambush the cowboys at a cabin. When the Kid shoots Mike, who is sitting in an outhouse and reaching for his gun, it will be the first time he kills anyone. While this scene does not impact Munny's disposition, it certainly affects the Kid's view of gunfighters and transforms his desire to be a famous killer in the mold of Munny and his uncle. Nevertheless, even though the Kid wishes to quit, Munny continues on in vengeance for the killing of Ned by Little Bill, and the film continues to be shaped by the utmost bare appearances of violence and their severe outcomes.

While the possibility of fortune and fame loom to entice the pursuit of frontier masculinity, *Unforgiven* takes shape through processes that reveal the stark form of this mode of masculinity. The severe and bare circumstances of their relations take shape and materialize in cries for water, screams of agony, shouts of no-no-no, scarred faces (in many forms), bruised and broken bodies, miserable situations, lots of looking over one's shoulder, dead friends, terrified onlookers, mourning friends and loved ones, vengeance, and the belief, "I don't deserve this, to die like this." But, as Munny states in response to Little Bill's claim, "deserves got nothing to do with it." Within the film it is apparent that Delilah did not deserve to have her face cut, and even Davey – who tried to stop Mike from violently assaulting Delilah and tried to give her a pony of her own – probably did not deserve the death he got. Mike's death in the outhouse is up for debate as Little Bill decried Strawberry Alice's demands for punishment, after the cutting of Delilah, on account of them being good, hardworking boys and not criminals, but clearly Alice and the other sex workers disagree. As for English Bob, Little Bill, and even Ned, it is apparent that they all have committed brutal and violent acts in their lives to varying degrees. While they may not feel that they deserve the treatment they received, following Buscombe and Nelson's

discussion of the Western and regenerative violence, they are all viewed in one way or another as in need of purging. Even Ned, who is a friend to Munny and the Kid, is an assassin and a criminal to many people in Big Whiskey, and it is implied that he has killed many people before. In his refusal to kill other evil men, following Buscombe and Nelson, he cannot be redeemed and becomes a non-hero to be eliminated from the community. Therefore, deserve has nothing to do with the form of masculinities within *Unforgiven* because some deserve what they get, others do not, and a few perhaps deserve worse outcomes than they receive – especially, Munny. What does take shape are stark forms of masculinities affecting and affected by a continuous threat of violence and the dreadful outcomes that materialize. Whether it is the dead women and children that Munny killed in Missouri, the scars on Delilah's face, the blood and life slowly leaving Davey's body, or Little Bill dying on a saloon floor, the only way these events become regenerative, as per Buscombe's interpretation, is through a forgetting of cinematic form. That is to say, this method of interpretation ignores the experience of the unique circumstances that structure these events and instead considers them as just another instance of already established ideas or categories.

Violence becomes represented as regenerative or outlaw and savage after the fact. In this way, Delilah's experience of Mike ruthlessly scarring her face becomes denied its particularity and specificity to stand in for all the terrible things done to the sex workers of Big Whiskey. This takes the scarring as just another instance of frontier violence the women have suffered, which allows them to project their own bruises and injuries – physical and emotional – onto the scars of Delilah as a motivation for the regeneration of their lives to be brought forth by the deaths of Mike and Davey. Likewise, the severe torture of Ned becomes, for the men of Big Whiskey, a means of eradicating the evil assassins that threaten the community because they see him as an

unlawful murderer of their friends who is protecting the other killers still on the loose – even if it also becomes the motivation for Munny to regenerate his own manhood in a violent, vengeful attack. Furthermore, even Mike's scarring of Delilah's face becomes the regeneration of his manhood after she gives a giggle at the sight of his "teensy pecker" – which perhaps he felt he did not deserve. However, deserve or not and regenerative or not remains within a binaristic logic that denies the experience of violence in the here and now by retroactively applying the regenerative principles of frontier masculinity. This application negates the individuating difference of each experience of violence by treating violence as a general and universal thing. Violence, in this manner, is understood as something that is identical in each occurrence (always violence) except for minimal distinctions amongst them – or what Deleuze identifies as a difference in degree. Following this understanding of violence as difference in degree, the categorization of violence as a choice of regenerative or savage ignores the specificity and the particularity of each violent event by insisting on the similarities that make classification possible – when violence occurs and then a community finds peace it is of the regenerative degree, but if there is no peace then it is merely the savage and outlaw degree of violence.

Through this denial of difference, which is manufactured by binaristic logic, the categorization of violence as regenerative or not is a matter of degree. To interpret the violence as regenerative or outlaw and savage is a method that denies difference (the individuating difference of each event in terms of specificity and particularity) and instead offers a binary choice, which are only categories of violence in general, or difference in degree that depend on what perspective one has of the outcome after the violence takes place. Therefore, one can see the oscillation that is possible through the comparison of choices for categorizing various acts of violence as differences in degree within the film. Where Ned, Munny, the Kid, and the sex

workers of Big Whiskey view the killing of Davey as regenerative, the cowboys see an act that is the violence of outlaws and the murder of a friend. Where Munny views Ned's torture and death as the violence of outlaws and the murder of a friend, the men of Big Whiskey see an act that is regenerative. And, where Mike views Delilah's giggle as the denouncing of his manhood and the motivation for regenerative violence, Delilah and the other sex workers see an act that is harmless. Depending on the perspective one takes – right or wrong – regenerative violence is only ever regenerative to some, it is a matter of degree that denies the difference of each violent event. Therefore, regenerative violence is a denial of the particularity and specificity of violence as it unfolds in each moment that is impossible to avoid as it affects and is affected by all involved – even mere onlookers cannot escape as the sex worker that shudders in fear as Munny kills many men in the saloon at the end of the film. *Unforgiven* takes shape through the stark form of these differences, which are structured through the bare appearance of violence as perpetrated on behalf of frontier masculinity in the configuration of severe outcomes.

The bare appearance of violence structures *Unforgiven* as the film takes shape around the prolonged duration of these events, which often unfold in a saloon that is darker than dark as the bare lighting generates a stark blackness. The masculinities within the film also take shape through a stark form that is darker than dark, especially Munny, who remains stiff and rigid throughout all the violent events of the film. In terms of regenerative violence, Munny's actions are understood as heroic because he provides Big Whiskey with a chance to rebuild its community that is cleansed of evil, but even this interpretation of a regenerative kind of violence retains the residue of outlaw and savage violence. "In the classic Western," states Buscombe, "the hero always has a bit of the wilderness in him. In *Unforgiven* the savagery is more pronounced; less easily 'forgiven'" (2004, 54). This interpretation applies another layer of

oppositional logic onto the characteristics of regenerative violence, which uses a nature-culture binary to sort the degrees within the regenerative category. Following Buscombe, frontier masculinity commits some violent acts that are simply savage and outlaw violence, but, in order to counter these acts and protect civilization, some violent acts are identified as regenerative, which combat savageness with a little less wilderness. In other words, for Buscombe, frontier masculinity is always related to nature, and for civilization to prosper then all frontier masculinity must be purged. In *Unforgiven*, Buscombe views Munny as a hero because his harsh characteristics fostered through his distance from civilization are the only weapon that can rid the community of evil men. "He is depicted," states Nelson in reference to Munny, "as a force of nature" (2013, 19). In accordance with this interpretation, Munny functions as the act of nature riding itself in a final act that allows culture, or civilization, to blossom. Through the recognition of representation, even the heroic acts of violence are condemned as signifying the wilderness that must be completely tamed in order for a community to thrive. This interpretation that relies on binary logic and representation restricts difference by reducing the differing of violence as it materializes in each unique circumstance – following Deleuze's notion of difference – to a set of differences in degree. First, there is the separation of regenerative from outlaw and savage violence, which leads to another separation within regenerative violence itself as the action of men with a little wilderness in them and then other instances, like *Unforgiven*, which have a lot more. Moreover, all of these instances of violence are categorized as connected to nature and a wildness that needs to be tamed, which is in opposition to the civilization that fosters peace and justice as connected with culture. In short, all violence is understood as identical because it is an act of nature with various differences in degree.

My discussion of *Unforgiven* and masculinities as a stark form generates a force to challenge the binaristic logic that reads frontier masculinity and violence in a denial of difference. This unfolds by focusing on the particularity and the specificity of each event as a dynamic process. In the remainder of this chapter, I seek to explore potentials for conceptualizations of masculinities by foregrounding a nature-culture continuum that stresses the interconnections within wilderness and civilization. Reading nature-culture as a continuum puts pressure on the recognition of representation and oppositional logic that denies difference, which offers more than simply a critique of frontier masculinity by generating alternatives that embrace masculinities as creative force. To explore these potentialities, my close readings for form interrogate the binaristic and representational ideals ascribed to the frontier and wilderness within the mythopoetic men's movement that arose in the 1990s contemporaneously with the films I discuss. This allows me to challenge the essentialist links between masculinity and nature, which generates the capacity to speculatively read the cinematic form of Western films from the 1990s for the unthought and the not yet as difference. Before turning to the formal dimensions of the films, I map the theoretical concepts of relevant masculinities studies discourses that are used to examine frontier masculinity as an ideal. Then I proceed to introduce the theoretical notion of a nature-culture continuum through philosophies of immanence. Following the discussion of these theoretical concepts, I undertake an examination of key ideas that link masculinities and the Western film as a lead-in to my close readings of the cinematic form in *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann 1992) and *Tombstone* (Cosmatos 1993) to offer conceptualizations of the forms that masculinities take within these films.

Mythopoetic Masculinity, The Frontier, and Self-Made Men

In Kimmel's *Manhood in America*, he outlines the important place that the frontier holds within formulations of American masculinities. In particular, Kimmel's masculine archetype of the self-made man takes the frontier as a site of rebirth where men can run in order to "start over, to make their fortunes and thus to remake themselves, to escape the civilizing constraints of domestic life" (2006, 30). No matter the location or social status of a man and the perceptions formed about his masculinity, any American man can attempt to rebuild himself as a "powerful, impervious" machine by heading west to embrace the myths of the self-made man and the frontier (ibid.). Through this practice, a man could counter perceived masculine insufficiencies by seeking the solutions available to him on the frontier. For Kimmel, the solutions of "self-control, exclusion, and escape" are "the dominant themes in the history of American masculinity until the present day" (ibid. 31), and the frontier offers the epitome of these solutions. Examining the development of this mythology, Kimmel outlines how the frontier remained an important space for American men in the 1860s when Western literature emerged as a popular genre of fiction. Although the frontier was still open for many of these men, or at least access to the wilderness was readily available, many men living in the East did not have the same freedom. "If middle-class men were unable to venture to the West, or even to the local pond," states Kimmel, "the tonic virtues of the wilderness could be brought to their homes; they could escape through fantasy" (ibid. 43). It is in fantasy, as much as it is in reality, that the myth of the frontier develops and becomes interconnected with the self-made man. If "the Self-Made seemed to be born at the same time as his country" (ibid. 13), then it is the frontier and the possibility of escape that it offers which becomes a fundamental component of American manhood. Wilderness, as Kimmel argues, has long been and continues to be a defining site of American

manhood – this also explains phenomena such as the weekend warriors of Robert Bly (2004), a poet and best-selling author as well as a leading voice of the men's rights movement.

Masculinities studies discourse, such as the work of Kimmel and Bly outline, identifies the wilderness as conditioning ideals of masculinity, which is a tendency that this chapter aims to theoretically engage with through the formal dimensions – rather than focusing on representations of masculinity – of the Western genre during a parallel period.

Bly's notion of the weekend warrior is synonymous with masculinity in the 1990s. Weekend warriors subscribed to mythopoetic masculinity, which directed North American men to seek refuge from their eroding privilege in the wild where they could be amongst nature and exposed to the elements. This ideal of masculinity resonates with the notion of the frontier as a source of traditional manhood, which could maintain a patriarchal hierarchy that fosters a mode of masculinity and provides a space for men to be self-made. Weekend withdrawals to lodges and attractions nestled within wooded locales were considered an opportunity for men to participate in activities and practices deemed conventionally masculine, activities which otherwise had vanished from the urban and suburban socio-cultural milieu. "All across the country in the first few years of the 1990s," Kimmel states, "men were in full-scale retreat, heading off to the woods to rediscover their wild, hairy, deep manhood" (2006, 208). While Kimmel perhaps overstates the impact Bly's mythopoetic masculinity had on the lives of North American men, he captures the importance of the wilderness within masculinities studies discourses as analyzed by both men's rights positions and those critical of them. People like Bly theorize a return to the frontier, or what aspects of it can be replicated, as a re-masculinization procedure (Kimmel, 2006, 207-211). Bly's 1990 book-length myth *Iron John: A Book About Men* advances what is, in his words, a "fairy tale" that tries to trace an ideal masculine

development in an effort to identify and validate the essential characteristics of masculinity that were lost as men assumed more modern lifestyles (2004, ix). It is not a myth that positions itself against women or homosexuals, Bly promises, and it is only the case that "this book speaks to heterosexual men" (2004, xiv). However, I argue that Bly's claim reads as a poor attempt to justify an exclusionary and sexist discourse. Nonetheless, Bly tries to assure readers that the book has no bad intentions because all mythopoetic masculinity wants to do is provide men with a how-to-guide that will allow them to revive a traditional masculinity that will nourish their souls. This guide serves men that pursue a recapturing of their spiritual bonds with nature, a retaking of their rightful place as fathers, and a rediscovering of their warrior brains. Bly's book might as well promise to make American men great again.

The discourse and praxis of mythopoetic masculinity is interconnected with the masculine crisis narrative of the 1990s and 2000s. Mythopoetic masculinity promised to provide stability for men as feminism and other struggles for equality were eroding American men's socio-cultural, political, and economic privileges (Kimmel 2013). However, not only was the perceived stability of mythopoetic masculinity an illusion, it encouraged the attempted embodiment of masculine ideals that were essentialist and disparaging. Thus, many gender studies scholars, including Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner, critiqued the mythopoetic men's movement to expose its fallacies and dangers (Kimmel 1995). "Even if we were sympathetic with their feelings of despair and gaping loneliness," Kimmel argues, "knowing that it always attends the blind pursuit of the elusive ideals of Self-Made Masculinity, the men's rights analysis was so misguided, its inversions so transparent, its anger so displaced onto those who have traditionally been excluded, that it hardly offered any man of reason a convincing picture of men's situation" (2006, 202). There are two important and interrelated observations

made here by Kimmel: one, in response to fluctuating relations of gender, mythopoetic masculinity promoted ideals for American men that deferred and denied embodiment ("elusive ideals"); and two, rather than seeking new relations within movements for equality, mythopoetic masculinity promoted a refashioned position of exclusion and, by extension, masculine privilege. Rather than seeking new potentialities, subjectivities, and relations within the fluctuating socio-cultural milieu of the late 1980s and the 1990s, many men resurrected the imaginary traditions and flawed fundamentals of a self-made masculinity heralded as re-strengthening men through a return to wilderness, nature, and the frontier as eternal fonts of manliness. Although the frontier had closed approximately a century prior – the frontier popularized by the Western genre existed from about 1860 to 1890 (Wright, 1975, 5) – it was and remains an accessible fantasy and an important mythic component of self-made masculinity (Kimmel 2006).

While the actual frontier was anything but a blank canvas – the indigenous communities of pre-settler North America were always already a vibrant socio-cultural locale – self-made masculinity fashioned the wilderness beyond American civilization as a fantasy space waiting to be molded by the efforts, strength, and ideas of men. The fantasy budded from the physical landing of the first settlers in the New World, and then it moved right across the Western United States on horseback, in wagons, and via trains to California, and it bloomed within the Western narratives of print and visual media. As settlements, laws, and government eventually closed the frontier, the imaginary space of Western media kept the myth of the frontier alive. Originally restricted to the pages of Western novels and short stories, the still landscapes of painting, and the static images of photography, motion images eventually became the principal medium for advancing the myths of the frontier in the 20th and into the 21st- century. Kimmel laments the role that Western films played in the maintenance of the frontier myth, especially as it offers a

fantasy space in which pursuers of mythopoetic masculinity can harbor. Pointing to the radical potentialities to rethink masculine subjectivities that are produced by fluctuating gender relations, Kimmel sees a missed opportunity for men where they could have embraced more responsible and generative images of masculinities. "But, who needed accurate pictures with the Hollywood dream machine around? Though traditional masculinity's foundations and definition were eroding," states Kimmel, "that definition was still the stuff of fantasy; books and films bolstered the masculine ego through fantasies of conquest and triumph against overwhelming odds" (2006, 202). In many regards, this has always been a function of the Western film: bolstering the masculine ego. Furthermore, at least in terms of the Western genre's representations of masculinity, most narratives of this genre tend to bolster the ego of the masculine protagonist, too. Kimmel's view of the Western films of the 1990s as a site that supported the masculine crisis narrative (which I interrogate further in Chapter Four) and mythopoetic masculinity is a principal motivation for my investigation of this genre.

Following Kimmel's argument, the Western films of the 1990s are important sites where socio-cultural issues regarding masculinities were represented. Many of the ills and troubles of men in the 1990s found fictional cures in the snake oil-esque combination of mythopoetic masculinity and the Western genre. The fantasy space of the frontier, according to Kimmel, gave inaccurate images and elusive ideals as solutions to the crisis of masculinity. Kimmel demonstrates this through an examination of Western films such as *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990), which, he states, "reinvents the heroic warrior as Rousseauian noble savage, inverts traditional cowboy and Indian mythologies (we cheer when the virtuous Indians kill the white soldiers), and retrieves lost manhood—a manhood that could never be achieved as long as our hero remained within the boundaries of eastern civilized life" (2006, 212). The success of

Dances with Wolves led to a rejuvenation of the genre by sparking a Western film cycle that included *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann 1992), *Unforgiven* (Eastwood 1992), *Geronimo: An American Legend* (Hill 1993), *Tombstone* (Cosmatos 1993), *Wyatt Earp* (Kasadan 1994), *Dead Man* (Jarmusch 1995), and *Wild Bill* (Hill 1995).³ In the 1980s, the Western genre had waned with only a few noteworthy entries, including *The Long Riders* (Hill 1980), the box-office disaster *Heaven's Gate* (Cimino 1980), *Silverado* (Kasdan 1985), and *Pale Rider* (Eastwood 1985). Given the fact that the Western genre re-emerged in the 1990s alongside the mythopoetic men's movement, there is work on the Western (such as Kimmel's discussion) that analyzes representations of mythopoetic masculinity in the Western films of the 1990s as reflecting the concerns or positions of masculinities within this historical and socio-cultural moment. However, my goal in this chapter is to interrogate the forms of masculinities through these ideas and in their particularity and specificity that can unfold a force through close reading of cinematic form with the capacity of creating new conceptualizations of masculine subjectivities. Therefore, I use the vibrant intensities of the Western genre to rethink the very notions of mythopoetic and self-made masculinity that Kimmel and others view them as representing.

The spirit of mythopoetic masculinity, as theorized by Bly, promises to resurrect masculine privilege and dominance by building structures – such as the weekend retreat – that will produce more authentic masculine identities. In connection, self-made masculinity is a myth that supports this mythopoetic spirit as it provides the basis maintaining the illusion that a person (in this case, specifically, a man) can master their environment and use their power to independently forge identity and success. The concept of mythopoetic masculinity embraces a set of structures and identities that are man-made – forged by men for men in order to produce men that are no longer weak. This weakness is constructed by the discourses of mythopoetic

³ Several of the films in this cycle were also box-office failures in comparison to the Western films of the 1980s.

masculinity and it is viewed as having a direct correlation to feminism and increasing socio-cultural equality. At the core of mythopoetic masculinity then, as fostered by Bly, is the belief that men are less masculine as a result of fluctuating gender relations as well as modern lifestyles, which separate men from wilderness. Consequently, in order to reclaim their masculinity, men need to seek out more masculine role models (such as Bly's Wild Man) and re-immense themselves within wilderness. As Mark Simpson states, "Bly stresses the timeless, pre-Christian origins of the story and offers it as an antidote to what he sees as the present-day dearth of images of 'real men' in popular culture" (1995, 258). Simpson, quoting Susan Faludi's position on Bly in *Backlash*, illustrates that Bly's issue is with "the prevalence of 'stereotypical sissies like Woody Allen—a negative John Wayne'" (ibid.). This lamenting of present-day images of masculinities, which are perceived to be weaker ("sissies") in comparison to past models, functions as a main component of the masculine crisis narrative: the need to return to a masculinity lost in the past, which is viewed to be a traditional and stronger masculinity. By extension, due to the imaginary, traditional masculinity having strong ties to wilderness, this component of the masculine crisis narrative upholds a nature-culture binary where nature is viewed as containing the necessary resources to produce strong, warrior men – the kind of men this discourse claims society needs and that are natural. In comparison, culture is viewed as something that weakens and feminizes men; it produces unnatural men that do harm to society through their softness that is evident in their inability to fulfill traditional and tough masculine activities associated with manual labor that are necessary for rural and wilderness survival. At the core of this binary is a deep connection with the Western genre, which is also understood as a genre that proposes, demonstrates, and upholds a nature-culture binary.

Nature-Culture: From Binary to Continuum

Through philosophies of immanence, as outlined in previous chapters, I propose that the nature-culture binary, at the core of mythopoetic masculinity and traditional understandings of the Western film genre, can be fractured and ruptured through close readings of the formal dimension of the Western films of the 1990s. By reading the vibrant intensities of these genre films, capacities emerge to rethink masculinities as well as their interconnections with nature – and, moreover, the wilderness, the frontier, and Kimmel's notion of the self-made man. This rethinking involves a shift from a nature-culture binary to a nature-culture continuum, which is stimulated by philosophies of immanence (Massumi 2002 & Braidotti 2013) as well as recently being embraced by some strands of the sciences (Prigogine & Stengers 1984 & Prigogine 1997). The nature-culture continuum, for Braidotti, "marks a scientific paradigm that takes its distance from the social constructivist approach, which has enjoyed widespread consensus. This approach posits a categorical distinction between the given (nature) and the constructed (culture)" (2013, 2). Therefore, the nature-culture continuum dissolves this distinction or boundary to conceive of structures, identities, and behaviors – among other things – and instead thinks of life as emerging, developing, and, furthermore, becoming as a continuum. "Nature and culture," states Massumi, "are in mutual movement into and through each other. Their continuum is a dynamic unity of reciprocal variation" (2002, 11). Thinking nature and culture as mutual movement has radical consequences for mythopoetic masculinity and traditional understandings of the Western film genre, which depend on a binary with clear demarcations between given and constructed. This mutual movement does not mean that things move back and forth between the two categories – that, for example, at one moment the frontier is within nature and then in the next it is within culture. Rather, a nature-culture continuum is non-dualistic and it embraces the

category-less-ness of dynamic matter that is an ongoing flux of becoming that affects and is affected by a multiplicity of other bodies. In other words, the frontier and all other perceived locations are simultaneously within conceptions of both nature and culture.

What we discover unfolding through the nature-culture continuum is a flow of vibrant interactions as well as interconnections. "Things we are accustomed to placing on one side or another of the nature-culture divide must be redistributed along the whole length of the continuum," argues Massumi, "under varying modes of operation, in various phases of separation and regrouping, and to different degrees of 'purity'" (2002, 11). In relation to mythopoetic masculinity, the nature-culture continuum implodes the notion that there exists a frontier of possibilities waiting to be crafted by a self-made man into the structures and identities that foster an authentic masculinity. Furthermore, in relation to the Western film genre, the nature-culture continuum de-hierarchizes and flattens the binary used to inform traditional understandings of the genre, as in Buscombe's interpretation of *Unforgiven*. Western film scholar Jim Kitses, in his work *Horizons West*, most notably articulates this binary through the categories of "The Wilderness" and "Civilization" where subheadings – such as "The Individual" and "The Community" as well as "Nature" and "Culture" – build and divide the content, stereotypes, and themes of the genre into a set of binaries (2004, 12). The Western film genre, according to Kitses' work, offers, "a structuralist grid focused around the frontier's dialectical play of forces embodied in the master binary opposition of the wilderness and civilization" (2004, 13). Kitses' structural grid informs an overarching comprehension of the Western film genre as representing a set of actions at the heart of the nature-culture binary where masculine cowboys tussle with the frontier – including the wilderness, outlaws, and Native Americans – in order to protect and provide for American freedom, a Christian God, homesteaders, and townspeople, especially

women and children. However, and to reiterate, reading the forms of masculinities in select Western films from the 1990s in conjunction with a nature-culture continuum, as opposed to a binaristic logic, can generate forces which can conceptualize and rethink masculinities as well as the notions of mythopoetic masculinity and Kimmel's notion of the self-made man.

This shift from binary to continuum is an important and timely theoretical move that has the capacity to rethink masculinities as well as the Western genre as dynamic processes, but this requires new concepts. "The collapse of the nature-culture divide requires that we need to devise a new vocabulary," argues Braidotti, "with new figurations to refer to elements of our posthuman embodied and embedded subjectivity. The limitations of the social constructivist method show up here and need to be compensated by more conceptual creativity" (2013, 82). Embracing Braidotti's call for a new vocabulary, my close reading for the forms of masculinities seeks to generate a creative force to devise the new. Also, as outlined in Chapters One and Two, I see limitations in film analysis that traces the representation of masculinities because it fits film content into ideas that already exist within our socio-cultural milieu through oppositional logic. Specifically, the content of the Western film genre can be considered a repetitive set of issues focused on masculinity and the frontier that can be traced within a nature-culture binary, but this type of analysis opens up few, if any, pathways for transformation and becoming. Furthermore, the content of the Western genre remains largely stagnant as the majority of Western films – even films with the best of revisionist intentions – uphold patriarchal and frontier mythology. The foremost issue masculinities studies can take with the Western genre is that there are always masculine heroes that validate a transcendent moral code. Some films do blur the line between outlaw and hero, but a Western film with wicked protagonists tends to counter with antagonists that are much more objectionable – such as the outlaws who are also the heroes in *The Wild*

Bunch (Peckinpah 1969) in comparison to the bad bounty hunters and the evil Mapache.

Similarly, inserting a non-white male or a female character into the position of masculine hero does little if anything to modify the mythology that sustains the content. For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, Little Jo in *The Ballad of Little Jo* upholds the ideals of frontier masculinity through resisting, which allows her to survive within the frontier. Her actions demonstrate that a cowboy hero will be courageous in the face of the frontier's lurking dangers and triumph in his or her own right – dead or alive – to ensure there is something good and right done.

Likewise, the Western film genre maintains a predominantly patriarchal view of sexuality. Through the cowboy hero, heterosexual ideals are framed as a dominant theme where the defeat of villains aligns with a successful romantic union, or at least the rejection of such a union in classical Westerns – as in *My Darling Clementine* (Ford 1946) when Wyatt Earp rejects the potential for a relationship with Clementine and rides out of town, or as in *Shane* (Stevens 1953) when Shane rides away rejecting the implicit romantic feelings between him and Marian. There are notable counterpoints to my generalization of the Western genre – most notably Robert Altman's so-called anti-Westerns *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971) and *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson* (1976). However, even as a critique, these films do not venture into alternative themes outside of the patriarchal conventions of the genre: *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* is situated within the interconnection between sex work and the frontier, and *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* focuses on the vanity and delusions of self-made men as well as the inherent racism of frontier mythology. Again, although there is clearly a critique of these representations and even a debunking of their myths within the films, this critique and debunking alone does not open up any pathways for rethinking the conceptualizations of masculinities available, which my

focus on a close reading for form unfolds through speculation. Consequently, bearing in mind anti-Westerns, Kites' structural grid still does appear to capture the heart of the genre's content (predominantly the narrative and the characters) and its entanglement with the frontier and self-made masculinity. Even when a film like *The Ballad of Little Jo* (Greenwald 1993) challenges and critiques the preconceived notions of the Western genre through a female hero, I argue that the film content relies on the same binaries that structure the conventions of the genre. The hero, Little Jo, is still a masculine hero and the frontier is still a place where masculinity can be self-made. In contrast, I see the genre as dynamic and non-dualistic through a close reading of its formal dimensions and reading for masculinities as forms, which unfolds a force that can be read in order to launch speculation to rethink masculinities. Therefore, as much as a repetition of structures and identities are at the heart of mythopoetic masculinity, Kimmel's notion of the self-made man, and the Western film genre, the forms of masculinities in the Westerns have the capacity to fragment and rupture that structuralist grid.

Representations of Masculinity in the Western Film

The Western has often been examined for its representations of masculinity, which I demonstrate in my discussions of *The Ballad of Little Jo* in chapter two and *Unforgiven* in this chapter. Lee Clark Mitchell argues that an "obsession with masculinity marks the Western" (1996, 3). For Mitchell, masculinity is the central premise of the Western that drives any of its stories. While he acknowledges that there is a set of problems that may be considered by Western narratives, Mitchell makes the case for masculinity being the core focus of the genre that weaves together the various elements of any narrative. "What actually brings them together into the narrative we recognize as a Western," argues Mitchell, "are a set of problems recurring

in endless combination" (ibid.) This set of problems that Mitchell outlines includes "the problem of progress, envisioned as a passing of frontiers; the problem of honor, defined in a context of social expediency; the problem of law or justice, enacted in a conflict of vengeance and social control; the problem of violence, in acknowledging its value yet honoring occasions when it can be controlled"; but, he stresses that all of these problems are subsumed by "the problem of what it means to be a man, as aging victim of progress, embodiment of honor, champion of justice in an unjust world" (ibid.). Conversely, Kitses is critical of Mitchell's understanding of the Western through masculinity and sees it as an oversimplification of a genre that is far more complex. Kitses calls Mitchell's book, as well as Jane Tompkins's work on masculinity and the Western, "the single-minded reduction of the genre to a discourse on masculinity" (2004, 17). Even though Kitses is quite critical, he does eventually concede, referring to Mitchell and Tompkins, that "the stretch of such a formulation may be useful if nothing else as a challenge to look differently at the genre" (2004, 18). In this sense, my reading of the forms of masculinities embraces Mitchell's as well as Kitses' view because I aim to use the formal dimension of the Western genre as structured by the dynamic processes of masculinities, but, at the same time, I use the vibrant intensities of the genre to launch a different seeing and thinking about masculinities in the Western by focusing on cinematic form. Therefore, while it is possible to interpret Western films as marked by an obsession with representations of masculinity, such a position can obfuscate other important issues unfolding in any given film as well as it can serve to perpetuate the myth of the self-made man by unwittingly ignoring the labor, efforts, sacrifices, violence, and inequality that give rise to the illusion. By thinking and reading through cinematic form as well as reading for forms, I harness a force of affects unmarked by the fixed narrative trajectory of

any given film, which insists on the particularity and specificity of masculinities taking shape as dynamic processes.

That being said, at a narrative level, the classical/traditional, revisionist, parody, contemporary, nostalgic, or any other type of Western film represents frontier masculinity, or at least characters adhering to frontier masculinity, and they are often the heroes driving the story. The genre is saturated with ideals of masculinity, whether it is in films about Western legends – such as Wyatt Earp, Billy the Kid, Wild Bill Hickok, and Jesse James – or films headed by star male leads such as John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, Clint Eastwood, and Kevin Costner. We can interpret these ideals as representing socio-cultural views on masculinity in any given historical moment, but the recognition of representations manufactures a view of masculinity as general, singular, and universal. These ideals of masculinity may be interpreted as working in the service of patriarchal ideology or it may be demonstrated that the film is subverting that very ideology. "The Western is typically preoccupied with notions of masculinity," state Mary Lea Bandy and Kevin Stoehr, "marked by chivalrous deeds and noble daring, and the classic westerner is traditionally male" (2012, 40). Traditionally, at least, the classic westerner holds himself to a high moral standard and seeks to save women, children, and less masculine men from danger. In Westerns produced during the era of Classical Hollywood (approximately 1915 to 1960), there is usually a clear line between good and bad characters, which constructs the Western hero as possessing masculinity *par excellence* in the spaces of the Classical Hollywood frontier where criminals and Native Americans (represented as villains) are plentiful and always seem willing to violate bourgeois morality. However, to reiterate, this type of analysis is based on the narrative elements of the film as a static and fixed text, which does not take into account the formal

dimensions of these films as generating the potential for speculation to conceptualize masculinities in relation to the unthought and the not yet.

While Western films of any era are marked with differences in degree, this preoccupation with masculinity remains consistent, as does the setting of the frontier. There is something grandiose about this fantasy of the frontier, especially viewed as a font of authentic masculinity as represented within the discourses of mythopoetic masculinity and the self-made man. Although masculinities studies scholars, such as Kimmel, critique the fallacies of frontier masculinity, its mythic virility appears to be immune to critique alone. Despite the emergence of new models of masculinities and the countless claims that the Western genre is dying, Kimmel's notion of the self-made man and representations of the heroic cowboy remain ideals of masculinity within a binaristic logic used to analyze the significance of the genre. Even though the popularity of the genre in any given moment may be in flux and John Wayne may no longer be the cowboy image for younger generations, telling men about the dangers of self-made masculinity does not appear to be effective in achieving the goal – following Kimmel and masculinities studies – of eliminating this cowboy image/ideal from the masculine imaginary. In fact, telling men to stop attempting to embody self-made masculinity is as effective a strategy as a sheriff, seeking to prevent violence, telling men to turn in their guns in a Western film. Therefore, as opposed to a critique of the Western film's representations of masculinity and a tracing of its subversions, in the readings that follow I use the intensities of the genre images to search for capacities to rethink relations between masculinities and the connotations of wilderness, nature, animality, and the self-made man associated with the frontier. Instead, I argue that the Western film genre contains – as much as it can be understood as having installed regimes of the frontier into the socio-cultural imaginary – alternatives to be opened up. These

alternatives unfold by embracing the nature-culture continuum, rather than oppositional logic, in close readings of masculinities as forms to generate speculation that can open up the unthought and the not yet.

Contrast: The Last of the Mohicans (Mann 1992)

The Western film genre unfolds within the wilderness and the emerging American communities scattered across the frontier. Within this setting, a hero emerges to confront evil, seek vengeance, or perhaps both. This basic narrative tendency is at the core of Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans*, even though it is a film set decades before the American Revolution. The film upholds a prominent aspect of the genre, which Grant states is "the mythic dimension of the Western" that "requires the hero to be associated with the wilderness and to have the opportunity to demonstrate in some spectacular fashion 'the art of the forest'" (2001, 200). Nathaniel (in other versions of the film as well as the novel he is identified by different names, but in Mann's version he is explicitly Nathaniel Poe, and also Hawkeye) could be read as Kimmel's notion of the self-made man *par excellence* and the epitome of Bly's mythopoetic masculinity as he refuses any allegiance to English law and appears to abide only by the codes of frontier masculinity. Given his willingness to oppose evil as well as his efforts to save women and men unfamiliar with the necessary practices to survive in the wilderness, there is the possibility to view Nathaniel as a representation of authentic masculinity. This authenticity could be identified by his adherence to ideals of individualism and conservationism while protecting women and children, which is viewed as the significance attached to his representation of masculinity. This is an essential part of Kimmel's notion of the self-made man in which men put their individual interests ahead of others, seek to maintain the land in a way that is beneficial for

their goals, and fulfill patriarchal duties towards women and children. It is these basic tenets that offer such promise to men seeking to embody the ideals in Kimmel's notion of self-made masculinity. "The search for authentic experience, for deep meaning," Kimmel states, "always led men back to the frontier, back to nature, even if it was inevitably the frontier of their imaginations" (2006, 212). Authenticity and nature are then intertwined for frontier masculinities, which, as Grant points out, are often represented in the Western film by a mastery of the wilderness in terms of providing food and shelter, navigating threats to survive, and using natural elements to one's advantage. While Nathaniel can be interpreted as a representation of authentic masculinity that is associated with these ideals of the self-made man, the forms of masculinities within the film generate the capacity to speculate and unfold alternative conceptualizations between masculinities and wilderness. Specifically, through a reading of masculinities as a form of contrast, I devise a challenge to the self-made man and the nature-culture binary.

The landscapes of the Western film genre possess affective capacities. From D. W. Griffith's lush eastern United States scenery in his silent Westerns to John Ford's use of Monument Valley to the vastness of the plains in films such as *The Big Country* (Wyler 1958), in many Western films the landscape is as much a character as the humans and nonhumans within it. In the 1990s, the cinematic form of Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* is a powerful expression of these capacities. Discussing filmic adaptations of James Fenimore Cooper's foundational western novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Scott Simmon states, "Michael Mann's version has an emotional force greater than any of the other adaptations, but it's force that comes only when the characters stop talking" (2003, 93). Pointing to moments when the characters stop talking, I read Simmon's as gesturing towards the affective capacities of the landscapes and other

visuals accentuated by active camera movement within the film. It is through these moments that, for Simmon, the film "reconnects the story with the power of silent film, especially in two ten-minute dialogueless sequences – the slaughter in the valley followed by a canoe chase, and the final Cliffside fight against Magua – that draw emotion from the lush eastern landscape of North Carolina's Great Smoky Mountains" (ibid.). The emotion Simmon identifies is traced to the landscape in *The Last of the Mohicans*, which is a powerful visual setting throughout the film. Even though these brief comments on the emotional force are as far as Simmon goes in his discussion of the film, there is an opportunity to explore the cinematic form of the film further. Simmon ties the emotion of Mann's film to spectatorship because the affective force is felt in the viewing experience of the film. However, I read *The Last of the Mohicans*, due in part to the landscapes, as generating a vibrant intensity that affects and is affected by the masculinities within the film. This method of reading focuses on the forms that take shape through affective relations rather than interpreting the effects of affect felt by a spectator in the experience of emotions, as discussed earlier in relation to Brinkema's radical formalism.

Perhaps one of the reasons that Simmon laments the dialogue of the film is because it does not have the same emotional weight in comparison to the strong impressions that the film visually imparts, and, as a result, the words of the characters fail to adequately represent these impressions in any given moment. That being said, I take Simmon's inability to articulate this position in greater detail as highlighting film theory's lack of tools for reading the formal dimension of a film as difference-in-itself (following Deleuze) that creates forces not only felt, but also through reading as creation. While film theory has developed the procedures to understand the spectatorial experience of difference, affects, and cinematic form in terms of the effects on a viewing body or mind, as previously discussed, when confronted with the task of

mapping the vital, pulsating source of this force, interpreted as emotional, there is a lack of pathways. However, this lack is not a negating absence that can only ever be projected onto a spectator or an element or as a representation because it remains unknowable in a structure, such as the symbolic within psychoanalysis that can only ever know the effects of the real and not the real itself. This is an absence harboring the potential to affirm pathways that illuminate the force of form rather than assuming it to be a lack of possibility that cannot be filled. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, my reading follows Brinkema's insistence on cinematic form to affirm such a pathway by addressing the structuring that generates what Simmon experiences as emotion. As the camera slowly pans within the opening shot of rolling, wooded hills, the image takes shape through the contrasting of individual intensities. It may appear that these are all the same kind of wooded hills – maybe even classifiable as mountains or massive rocks with vegetation growing on them – but each mound, each greening shape with individuating difference generates an image structured by a contrast. But this is not a contrast between two hills juxtaposed to one another. This is a form of contrasting that takes shape through the contributions of each intensity that does not rely on one hill in comparison to the rest – as an original or an ideal of a wooded hill – because this is a process of differences not the sorting of elements that are different. "Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given," states Deleuze, "but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse" (2004, 280). Therefore, as spectators we may identify the diversity of the rolling, wooded hills or even the diversity of the masculinities in the film, but this is to understand wooded hills or masculinities within the recognition of representation. For example, we may identify hills that are bigger or hills that are smaller, and masculinity that is rugged and masculinity that is cultured. This type of interpretation, as

discussed, assumes elements to be static and fixed rather than ongoing processes that are beyond givens.

In to the opening of the film, after a fade to another shot of wooded hills, the camera tilts down and then there is a cut to Nathaniel running through the forest, but it is less a running and moving through (he is not going from one side of the forest to the other and eventually emerging from the forest) as it is a running and moving within as he, along with his father Chingachgook and his brother Uncas, chases a deer – some readers may note that they are his adopted family, but throughout the film he refers to them as his father and his brother. The forest matter, including trees and rocks, does not act as simply something to be passed over by the men; rather, matter requires navigation in acts of going around and climbing over as the bodies of Nathaniel, Chingachgook, and Uncas grip and are gripped by the materiality of the forest. The mobile camera that moves within the forest alongside the characters unfolds a series of moving shots that show the depth and ruggedness of the terrain. Tree trunks, rocks, and branches obscure the running characters in one moment only to frame them within the next. The fluidity of the images comes to a slowness as Nathaniel and Uncas perceive the deer they have been chasing, which is also moving within the forest as the scene unfolds. Within this sequence, the trees, the rocks, the deer, and other assemblages of materiality share space and time with Nathaniel, Chingachgook, and Uncas as each body shapes a form of contrast as an individual intensity in process of differing. Contrast as a form is more than the variation between two individuals or objects – such as the difference between Nathaniel's and Chingachgook's masculinity, or Nathaniel as a human and the deer as a nonhuman. The formal dimension of *The Last of the Mohicans* affectively materializes as a dynamic process of contrasting sustained by a multiplicity of differing, which unfolds the cinematic form as a configuration of individuating differences of each thing –

characters, deer, rocks, trees, and the like becoming different with each passing moment – as well as the configuration of a whole as generated by transforming corporeal relations. In this sense, masculinities are a form of contrast in *The Last of the Mohicans* that is never composed by simply juxtaposing two different kinds of masculinity– whether it is Nathaniel in comparison to Major Duncan, Colonel Munro in comparison to Marquis de Montcalm, or Magua in comparison to Uncas. There is always a complex set of relations that shape as well as spark differences within the forms of masculinities as individuating contrasts along a nature-culture continuum as ongoing transformations.

If there is any doubt that *The Last of the Mohicans* is a Western film, that doubt disintegrates as this scene continues with Nathaniel raising his musket, taking aim, and pointing the barrel directly toward the camera. There is a reverse shot to the deer moving within the forest, another body gripping and gripped by the forest's materiality, then a cut back to Nathaniel as he fires the musket directly into the camera, an image with an intertextual lineage that can be mapped back to *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter 1903), a film considered influential in sparking the Western genre (Neale 2000). After the shot, the group makes its way to where the deer's body fell to the forest floor and Chingachgook honors the deer killed by Nathaniel, saying, "We're sorry to kill you, brother," and "We do honor to your courage and speed, your strength." It is sequences such as this that Simmon sees as dominating the film, which manufactures a split between the emotions generated by long sequences of the landscapes and environment and then the scenes with dialogue. However, I read for form as contrast throughout the film rather than as marking an oppositional structure. In this method of closely reading cinematic form, the immense interminglings of characters and landscape, of human bodies and nonhuman bodies, of vibrant materiality, is not taken as characters against landscape or human bodies juxtaposed to

nonhuman animals. Neither is this, following Simmons, a contrast of scene types: sequences without dialogue that show the power of the landscape to affect a spectator's experience, and moments with character dialogue that are less powerful and even diminish the spectator's engagement with the film. Instead, I read the three men and the deer as moving within the forest as they grip and are gripped by other bodies as interconnected with materiality, with the forest, with nature, with the wilderness as a vibrant intensity configured by the individuating difference of assemblage. A form that unfolds as a dynamic process of contrasting, but not a stagnant comparison of two fixed points – Nathaniel against the deer – and instead flows and transformations that spark ongoing contrasts within and among bodies as much as the whole also constitutes alterations of contrasts. The form of masculinities is contrast knotted within relations, as the emerging of relations, and a whole that persists by the continuous flux of individuating differences as the vibrancy within the film's lush landscapes unfold. There is no mastery of the forest and there is no man making himself out of a dense, passive clump of wilderness. Masculinities take shape through the relations of difference that affect and are affected by them as well as the contrasts that continuously unfold this difference.

Chingachgook's words that come after moving within the forest and killing the deer can be interpreted as a manifestation of culture (a representation of the Mohican practice of honoring nonhuman animals) against the forces of nature (represented by the deer as well as the act of killing for food and survival). Nonetheless, when the formal dimension of these moments is closely read as an event, they can be mapped as a continuum where this chase sequence is as much cultural praxis – moving within the forest as a form of masculinities that embraces and respects the vital assemblages that unfold life – and the honoring of the deer by Chingachgook is as much a part of nature – doing what is required to consume another body in order to endure.

The film as a form of contrast does not offer a beginning and ending to nature and culture within a binaristic logic, but nature and culture take shape as contrast that never distinguishes completely between one or the other, and instead they always generate relations between a multiplicity of individuating differences.

Despite my affirmative reading of Nathaniel's – as well as Uncas' and Chingachgook's – interconnectedness with the materiality of the forest as a form of contrast, other readers may interpret Nathaniel as representing the same "imaginative mythopoeic process" that Robert Baird critiques Dunbar for in his discussion of *Dances with Wolves* (1998, 278). Nathaniel could be understood as embodying true American-ness in terms of Baird's "Going Indian" which involves "going backward into history, back into tribalism" (ibid.). In this sense, Nathaniel could be read as representing the epitome of mythopoetic masculinity according to a binary logic that reveals he is *the* masculinity forged in the wilderness, in nature, which is categorized in opposition to the effeminate and cultured Major Duncan Heyward. From this recognition of representation, it may be inferred that Cora rejects Duncan and chooses Nathaniel because Duncan represents precisely the weak men that Bly laments and, in comparison, Nathaniel represents the perfect model of a strong man in touch with his warrior brain. However, we should resist such an interpretation because it places the characters into a transcendent code of representations that seeks to align the film within what already exists and, through its restrictive binaristic logic, it negates any capacities to rethink masculinities. This negation of difference occurs if we identify Nathaniel as representing Bly's mythopoetic masculinity and assert, with Bly, that masculinity has essentialist ties to nature. Furthermore, even if we argue against this interpretation to offer a critique of Nathaniel's representation as problematic, then we are still negating this difference by assuming Nathaniel is associated with Bly's concept. In other words, either we side with Bly and claim that

men should attempt to obtain masculinities similar to the model presented by Nathaniel (influenced greatly by nature), or we oppose the fact that popular culture offers Nathaniel as an idealized representation of mythopoetic masculinity and then we proceed to outline why such a representation is destructive. Neither option offers us an affirmative rethinking of masculinities because Bly's position provides an idealized model that will always defer and deny embodiment. Conversely, the anti-mythopoetic masculinity position outlines a list of reasons why this ideal masculinity is damaging and it promotes a substitute ideal that men should pursue, which also operates through a binary logic. This position focuses on representation as a means to criticize the ideological effect such ideals of masculinity have on spectators.

Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* generates a force that can conceptualize an affirmative rethinking of masculinities because of the force generated by reading masculinities as a form of contrast shaped by the interconnectedness of materiality. Despite the fact that Nathaniel can be understood as representing a traditional Western hero who uses violence and courage to defeat evil, my close reading of the opening scene unfolds an alternative through the film's formal dimension where Nathaniel is not merely an independent, self-made entity. Where a Western such as *Dances with Wolves* fills the soundtrack with the voice-overs of Dunbar that place a transcendent meaning onto each shot, *The Last of the Mohicans* is structured through many shots of the landscape without dialogue or voice-over, where humans are either absent or obscured by trees, rocks, and other parts of the environment. A notable moment of this structure occurs after Nathaniel, Uncas, and Chingachgook come to the aid of Cora, Alice, Duncan, and British soldiers following the ambush by Magua and the Huron on the road to Fort Henry. Following the scene where Nathaniel tells Cora, Alice, and Duncan that they will take them to the Fort, there is a close-up of Cora picking up a pistol, then the sisters embrace each other, and then there is a cut

to a river flowing into a small waterfall. The camera slowly moves to the left, eventually revealing the group in an extreme long shot below the waterfall. We could interpret this shot in several ways. First, we may want to see it as merely part of the film's grammar. In this sense, the shot is viewed as a hybrid-type of establishing shot through which Mann provides the terrain of the next scene by showing the landscape and then moving the camera to the characters instead of cutting to them – as is the case with a traditional establishing shot that will show the location and then cut to the characters within a section of that location. Second, we could also see the shot of the river as authorial expressivity in which Mann is flaunting the location shooting and inserting shots of the landscape to distinguish the film from the previous filmic adaptations of Cooper's novel. While both of these possibilities explain a reason for the shot, I closely read the formal dimension of the sequence as configured by the river – and other shots of the landscape in the film – as a contrast that undermines the self-made masculinity of Nathaniel as the Western hero. By foregrounding wilderness and characters within a fluid configuration – generated by a shot of the river that transitions into a shot of the characters rather than cutting to shots of each – the cinematic form structures the relations of characters within an environment that is an ongoing process of dynamic movement, which no masculine hero, let alone any one element, has the possibility of exerting power over. Therefore, Nathaniel could be identified as representing a mastery of the forest through oppositional logic, but I argue the formal dimension of the film disrupts the foundation of that representation by gesturing towards the many relations and forces that compose life. Thereby, a close reading for form ruptures the recognition of representation through a focus on difference that unleashes a destabilizing force. Masculinities as a form of contrast – which aligns with the close reading of the cinematic form as a form of contrast – creates the potential for Nathaniel to persist as an individuating difference along a nature-culture

continuum configured in relation to a multiplicity of other individuating differences, which do not exist as fixed elements for comparison but as a dynamic process of continuous transformation.

While it may initially appear quite obvious that *The Last of the Mohicans* contains contrasts – such as Nathaniel versus Duncan, the English versus the French, the Huron versus the Mohicans, and even the empiricism associated with the frontier versus the encroaching legalism or rationalism of civilization, the form as contrast is significantly different. The film does not manufacture contrast as opposite sides of a coin, or reverse shots within a sequence. Only the recognition of representation sorts the elements of the film, as static and fixed, according to a binary logic. In my reading, Mann's film is contrast as a form. There are countless examples throughout the film of elaborate tableau shots, which express a continuum of experiences in their particularity and specificity in relation of contrast.

For example, in the sequence I last described, Duncan and Nathaniel's conversation is framed in a two-shot as opposed to just a shot-reverse shot (*figure 3.1*).



figure 3.1 – *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann 1992)

While there is a shot-reverse shot of Nathaniel and Duncan within this sequence, the two-shot is accentuated by the river, and in the final shot of the sequence the flowing river alone becomes the focus without a human character present in the shot. There is never simply Nathaniel and Duncan as fixed points in opposition, but always also the flow of the river, the formations of rock, and the thickening and the dwindling of vegetation, which affect and are affected by relations as well as their individuating differences. The forces of their surroundings influence and form their subjectivities given the experience of any present moment as an immersion within the wilderness, which prevents the preferences of Duncan, England, and, moreover, civilization from coming to the fore completely. That being said, Duncan remains a presence throughout as a difference configuring within contrast as the preferences of Nathaniel, the frontier men, and, moreover, the wilderness always remain intensities of a continuum. Duncan, Nathaniel, England, the frontier men, civilization, wilderness, and many other differences are offset completely by a single opposition. Duncan is always in relation to Nathaniel, but also the interests of England – not always aligned with his own in any given moment, as in his urging Colonel Munro to refuse the terms of surrender – as well as the particularity and the specificity of the environment that contains any event – on a continuum of nature-culture. Furthermore, Nathaniel – and, by extension, other aspects of the film which a recognition of representation would deem to be in the category nature – does not exist as nature, but as a reciprocal variation along a nature-culture continuum. In this sense, Nathaniel's practices, customs, and beliefs are not in opposition to culture and instead part of a process that is both culture and nature in varying ways depending on the moment as well as the perspective, as discussed in the analysis of the opening scene above. Also, through this analysis, Duncan and the British army are read as mutual movement along a nature-culture continuum, where the interests of England are as much a growth as the

germination of specific views within a new location affecting and affected by a process of relations sparked by the location's particularity. The film never becomes fixed as an either/or – nature or culture – and instead the cinematic form continuously shapes through the differences vital to contrast.

The forms of masculinities that Nathaniel and Duncan unfold are shaped through the interconnections of nature and culture – shaped as much by human customs and practices as they are by the autopoietic forces of life. Whether they choose to acknowledge it or not, the British soldiers, including Duncan, also grip and are gripped by the materiality of the wilderness. As much as the British could be understood to represent culture with their glaring red coats against the lush green wilderness, they are also irremovably interconnected with nature. These relations are particularly evident as the British army leaves Fort Henry after surrendering to Montcalm and the French. The British march away from Fort Henry along a roadway that has been manufactured by culture as it is now a colonial road, even though it may once have been a route used by the Indigenous peoples long before the appearance of Europeans, and perhaps the route was initially a narrow trail cut through the wilderness by deer or other migrating animals. However, as much as it is manufactured by cultural praxis – whether the culture of European armies, frontiersmen, Indigenous peoples, or nonhuman animals – this roadway is also simultaneously engrossed by nature as process. Not only are there a multiplicity of forces at a micro level within the roadway – at the many places where a seed sprouts or maybe the places where beetles or ants churn, which in many ways is a culture unto itself – but also at a macro level the roadway is surrounded on both sides by dense forest. The roadway could be viewed as splitting the forest, taming a section of the forest, or engulfed within the forest, but, nonetheless, the forest and the roadway are on a continuum where they meet, join, and even intertwine, as

opposed to being decisively split apart as the given is contrasted with the constructed. This configures formally as the British army enters a large clearing and the camera cuts from the British soldiers to a shot from within the forest itself (*figure 3.2*). Now, the trees obscure the soldiers and express that they are intertwined with the forest. The image contrasts the bits of red coats, the patches of bright green vegetation surrounding the roadway, and the presence of darker trees in the foreground. The camera slowly pans to follow the movement of the army on the roadway, and then there is a cut back to shots of the British from the roadway, and then the camera cuts back to the forest to reveal Magua watching from within the forest (*figure 3.3*).

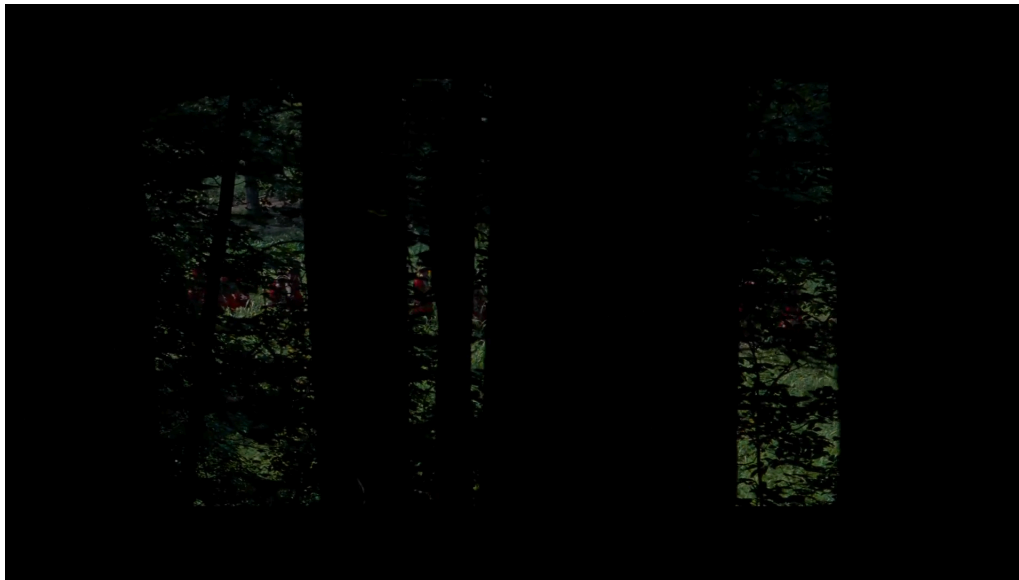


figure 3.2 – The Last of the Mohicans (Mann 1992)



figure 3.3 – The Last of the Mohicans (Mann 1992)

Through an interpretation that employs the recognition of representation, the British Army could be identified as being ignorant of nature and the power of the wilderness, and, in comparison, Magua, the Huron, and the other Indigenous peoples within the film could be understood as superior when it comes to harnessing "the art of the forest" – to recall Grant's point earlier. While this interpretation is possible in terms of representation and binaristic logic, closely reading for form as contrast opens up alternatives. Specifically, returning to the two shots from the forest (*figure 3.2 to 3.3*), in the later shot with Magua the trees within the forest are much more illuminated and many more leaves with varying shades of green are distinguishable in the distance between the roadway and the foreground. This subtle shift in lighting between the two shots of the forest increases the differences within the shot: in the initial shot there are soldiers and the vegetation around the roadway visible against a black silhouette-like forest, then the silhouette-like forest becomes multi-layered and Magua is visible in the second shot. Contrasting relations generated by and between Magua, the trees, the vegetation, the British army, and various other elements that combine to shape the cinematic form. Furthermore, the

form as contrast pushes against the assumptions and boundaries of a nature-culture binary. This occurs because the film brings us back time and time again, visually and narratively, to the consequences that result from supposing two similar things to be equal.

For example, it would be possible to assume that the forest harbors dangerous and wild entities that pose a threat to the British army and, moreover, civilization. After all, attacks come from the forest numerous times before this late scene after the British army surrenders Fort Henry. The dangers of the forest are clear even before the first attack by the Huron when Duncan, Cora, Alice, and British soldiers are travelling to the fort. During this trip to the fort, there is a sequence where Cora looks around the forest from her horse and observes a mountain lion in the bushes to the side of the trail. This predator obviously poses a possible threat, and the hiss the nonhuman animal makes strikes Cora's body and she shudders, clearly affected within her new relations. The image of the mountain lion could be interpreted in several ways. One would be to identify the lion as representing the dangers of the forest, which need to be tamed by civilization. This interpretation would then tie into the narrative development moments later, as Magua leads the group into an attack by the Huron. However, equating these two similar bodies within the forest – the body of the mountain lion and the bodies of the Huron as threats – comes undone if the force of an event within the attack sequence is taken into account.

After Nathaniel, Chingachgook, and Uncas have arrived to disrupt the attack, Chingachgook chases one of the Huron into the forest and, at this moment, Duncan takes aim and prepares to shoot at Chingachgook. The film cuts from Cora quickly urging, "No, Duncan," to Duncan aiming at Chingachgook just as Nathaniel is grasped by this danger and works to impede Duncan's shot. Duncan's error arises because he equates things similar in kind yet different in degree. For Duncan, the Native Americans (the Huron) that attacked them were

dangerous, and because Chingachgook is also a Native American then he, too, must be dangerous. Jane Bennett and William E. Connolly (2002), through Nietzsche's philosophy, map the benefits and shortcomings of systems that rely on the equalization of similar things. Their challenge is to push our thinking beyond the limits and restrictions we impose through binaristic logic to grasp a continuum that is an ongoing and complex process. This thinking risks the known and representations – the understanding that arises from organizing things according to preexisting categories – for the new and the unthought that transforms what is known and makes representation inadequate. Reducing nature-culture to a binary of knowable categories – differences in kind and differences in degree – imposes an illusion on us that keeps us from grasping the intensities that unfold life as the new, which is an autopoietic flow of becoming. "So there is a side of us capable of coming to terms, though only fugitively," Bennett and Connolly state, "with dimensions of the world that escape, exceed, resist and destabilize the best equalizations of nature we have been able to devise and enforce" (2002, 150). Form as contrast within *The Last of the Mohicans* generates this capacity for coming to terms with difference as individuating and as undoing the possibility of categorization through similarities. The futility of equalization marks Duncan's error in the assumption that Chingachgook is the same as Magua and other Huron, or that all bodies in the forest are similarly threatening. For Bennett and Connolly, "the Nietzschean perspective – in conjunction with efforts to overcome existential resentment of a world taken to have these characteristics – encourages us to become more responsive to those natural/cultural processes by which brand new things, beings, identities and cultural movements surge into being" (ibid. 151). This involves resisting a tendency to construct equalizations, which is precisely what *The Last of the Mohicans* as a form of contrast always layers once more by never simply being a comparison manufactured by oppositional logic.

The form as contrast drives this realization of the new, of difference, of affect in a breakdown of equalizations, which continuously unfolds differences against and within attempts to categorize and to use binaries. This moment when Nathaniel's force stops Duncan from shooting at Chingachgook is a key to reading the cinematic form of the film. To reiterate, his breakdown of equalizations returns again and again throughout the film. For example, Duncan is shocked to learn that Magua is a Huron and not a Mohawk, which is an assumption made by the British officers and Colonel Munro. Also, the breakdown of equalizations occurs when the frontiersmen assume that the word of one British officer is equal to that of all British officers but then learn that Munro will not let them return to their families as promised. In addition, Munro and the British army assume that their surrender to the French also involves the Huron because they are fighting together, but they are mistaken. And, perhaps most intriguingly because it demonstrates that masculinities in the film are in flux, Nathaniel assumes that Duncan tells the Huron chief to take Nathaniel in Cora's place to be burned because Duncan has wanted to see him killed throughout the film. Of course, none of these assumptions, made through procedures of equalization, materialize as events unfold. Conversely, as Bennett and Connolly discuss, Nietzsche realizes that equalizations were important for human survival because the procedure allowed some humans to find more food and determine other important aspects of survival by taking similar things to be equal – if I can eat the fruit from this tree, then I must also be able to eat the fruit from a different kind of tree (ibid. 149). However, reliance on this procedure becomes problematic if we seek to embrace difference as the unthought and not yet that can open up alternative conceptions of masculinities. By imposing categorization based in a binary procedure that identifies significance through differences in kind and in degree, difference-in-itself as the particularity and the specificity of any given moment is no longer a vibrant intensity

and instead it is explained away. In this manner, Duncan points his gun at Chingachgook and the British army assumes that the Huron also adhere to the terms of their surrender.

A reliance on equalizations leads to an interpretation of the final battle scene, before the Huron attack the British army, that identifies Magua and his fellow Huron with nature and as representing a dangerous monolith needing to be tamed by civilization aligned with the British army as well as the frontier men as identified with culture – this recalls the heart of Kites' Western binary, discussed above. However, as we return to the forest after an initial tree silhouette-like shot, I read the formal dimension of the film taking shape through contrasts that challenge and pose an alternative to this binary representation. In this sequence, the boundaries between wilderness and civilization are visible as constructs when the cultural practices of the Mohican and the Huron manifest as a complex set of relations. In terms of representation, we may trace the Mohican and Huron practices as equal because they are both signified by interactions with the wilderness – especially, scenes of Nathaniel and the Mohicans moving within the forest as well as scenes of Magua and the Huron using aspects of the forest to their advantage when fighting the British army. Yet, even though they may be similar in this regard, these scenes of the Mohicans and the Huron unfold individuating differences between Mohican and Huron as well as within each Mohican's or Huron's becoming. Moreover, the British soldiers themselves are not somehow outside or in control of this wilderness because the forest and a multiplicity of other forces also grip them. Each event becomes not the effort, mastery, or strength of one man upon nature, but contrast as a complex process of relations and tensions that generate new actions, new beliefs, new practices, new ideas, and new modes of becoming. Mann's tableau shots express this contrast in many different ways (see *figures 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6*).



figure 3.4 – The Last of the Mohicans (Mann 1992)



figure 3.5 – The Last of the Mohicans (Mann 1992)



figure 3.6 – *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann 1992)

The masculinities as a form of contrast are shaped by the multiplicity of relations in each one of these scenes, which pushes beyond the ability of any one man to control the situation no matter what codes of frontier masculinity he adheres to. Likewise, this close reading for form generates a force – because it is only through reading for form that masculinities have any force at all, to paraphrase Brinkema – that goes beyond the binaristic logic that produces interpretations through the significance and the association of representations. Even Nathaniel, who could easily be categorized through Kimmel's notion of the self-made man as a representation of frontier masculinity, does not overcome Munro's shackles on his own, nor does he save Cora on his own. Furthermore, he does defeat his foe Magua in the end. All of these events unfold through relations with his brother, father, and Duncan as well as various other assemblages that take shape through the continuous configuring of contrast. And, while he can be identified as a skilled frontiersman, the processes of nature and culture always grip him as well as others as much as any human grips the forces of nature. In one of the most significant moments of the film, the attempted escape from the Huron after the attack on the British army

leaving Fort Henry, Nathaniel is unable to take control of the river and harness it to escape. Instead, he as well as his father and brother are forced to abandon Cora, Alice, and Duncan as the intensity of the river, the waterfall, as well as the safety they initially find behind the waterfall, prove beyond Nathaniel's control. This applies pressure to the ideals of frontier masculinity, which read nature as a passive substance to be molded by the efforts of Kimmel's self-made men. Admittedly, eventually all of these fractures and ruptures are papered over by the very same trajectory and narrative that brings about a concluding scene that can be read as being on par with Classical Hollywood films for representing the ideology of patriarchal law through the union of a man and woman. However, this ending as well as Nathaniel's many heroic acts do not negate the structure of contrast with intensities generated by these shots of landscape and by the emergence of trees, rocks, and other materiality as characters alongside humans. Only the recognition of representation that treats these dynamic processes as static and fixed elements can interpret while using binaristic logic as a denial of difference. Through my close reading of the formal dimension of *The Last of the Mohicans*, I conceptualize contrast as a vital stimulus for masculinities that shape them in processes that depend on a multiplicity of relations, which stems from the autopoietic forces of life that cannot be controlled or molded as merely passive and inert nature by any body, or bodies, let alone a self-made man.

Gamble: Tombstone (Cosmatos 1993)

George P. Cosmatos's *Tombstone* contains a narrative that upholds the myths of frontier masculinity as well as the classical conventions of the Western film genre. There is no debate of whether or not the film is revisionist like *Unforgiven*. Against other Westerns from the 1990s that are considered to be revisionist – including *Unforgiven*, *Posse*, and *The Ballad of Little Jo* –

Philip J. Deloria argues that *Tombstone* "reasserts the primacy of white male violence and the uninverted western, suggesting that traditional masculinity is the vital underpinning for the 'family values' on which society is founded" (1995, 1197). The traditional masculinity that Deloria refers to is a representation that conveys similar characteristics to Kimmel's notion of the self-made man, which functions through self-control, exclusion, and escape, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Like *Unforgiven*, violence is viewed as necessary to establish a community (the family values of society), which is enacted by someone seen as embodying a traditional masculinity (also aligned with the self-made man). In *Tombstone*, Wyatt Earp is the principal representation of traditional masculinity as a self-made man who withstands the challenges and hardships posed by villains in order to arise triumphant. As Mr. Fabian tells Josephine Marcus when she enquires about Wyatt, he is the "quintessential frontier type, note the lean silhouette, eyes closed by the sun, but sharp as a hawk, he has the look of both predator and prey." In this sense, even to the other characters within the film, he is associated with frontier masculinity and the ability to strike violently if necessary. Following Deloria, Wyatt's masculinity is associated with the ideals of Kimmel's notion of the self-made man, which emerges as the dominant, or hegemonic, masculinity within *Tombstone*. Wyatt can be identified as a man who uses self-control to get the better of his enemies, who enacts violence as a means to exclude unwanted people and practices from the community, and who escapes any situation or relationship that does not serve his own interests. However, despite the ability to interpret *Tombstone* as representing a traditional masculinity associated with the self-made man, my close reading of the formal dimension of the film undoes the tenets of Kimmel's self-made man by illuminating the relations that generate masculinities as a form of gamble.

Consider Wyatt's arrival in the town of Tombstone with his brothers. As the Earp brothers take stock of the town, Marshal Fred White points out that the Oriental Saloon is the only place where business is not booming. Seeing an opportunity, Wyatt heads into the establishment to check things out. Upon learning that Johnny Tyler, who threatens others with guns, is the problem at the Oriental Saloon, Wyatt confronts Johnny by telling him, "I just want to let you know that you're sitting in my chair." It turns out Johnny has been bluffing with his gun threats – or at least he does not have the gumption to pull his gun on Wyatt. After slapping him in the face a few times, Wyatt removes Johnny's gun from his person and drags him out of the saloon by the ear. In exchange for solving the problem, the owner of the saloon agrees to give Wyatt and his brothers 25% of the house winnings from gambling. Through the recognition of representation, this scene can be interpreted, at the narrative level, as signifying Wyatt's dominance and control as well as his aptitude for making business opportunities for the Earp Brothers, demonstrating his self-making prowess. However, examining the formal dimensions of the scene demonstrates the multiplicity of relations and chances that structure this event as more than Wyatt simply getting the best of Johnny through his more dominant masculinity.

The masculinities take shape as a form of gamble. First, when Wyatt walks up to the Oriental Saloon, he has success, or a certain result, in mind as the motivation for taking an interest in the problems that keep the saloon from being profitable – he is affected by an interest in profit. Upon entry in the saloon, Wyatt takes note of the behavior of the others there, especially Johnny, before heading over to confront the problem. This is all structured through calculations that take into account the various relations that configure the situation at hand, which allows him to determine exactly who the problem is. Like any gamble, there are a number of relations that influence possible outcomes: Johnny has a gun, which poses a risk in itself; there

are other men sitting around Johnny and working at the saloon, who could support Johnny or turn on him; there is the owner, who may or may not have a vested interest in keeping Johnny around because he might be a friend or relative; and Wyatt himself does not have a gun on him, which could pose an additional risk if Johnny pulls his gun. Wyatt takes all of these factors into account, explicitly or implicitly, as he inquires with the owner about the issue of the saloon's poor business, and observes that Johnny is rude to the other men around him – perhaps indicating that he has no friends here. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee when Wyatt approaches Johnny that his challenge will be successful, that Johnny will not pull his gun, that another man at the saloon will not strike Wyatt with his back turned, and that, even if successful, the owner will agree to giving up a stake of his gambling profits. In short, the relations within the scene are structured by chance, and Wyatt's masculinity – even a masculinity that could be interpreted as representing the frontier and Kimmel's notion of the self-made man – is a form of gamble.

This is a risky action, on the part of Wyatt, in the hope of obtaining a desired result (a stake in the Oriental Saloon), which is structured. There is a series of calculations and posturing on the part of both Wyatt and Johnny as well as the rest of the observers in the saloon that choose to waive their ability to influence the outcome – such as one of the men pulling his own gun in support of Johnny or Wyatt. Furthermore, Johnny also engages Wyatt – after all, he originally confronts him by asking, "Is there something on your mind?" – which is also a form of gamble as he is risking the loss of his power as well as his life in an attempt to maintain his own position in the saloon. Therefore, through a process of risking with the potential to be influenced by any number of relations and factors, whether the interests of others in the saloon or a physical stimulus such as alcohol or a gun being pulled, the scene and the masculinities are a form of gamble. This form is accentuated in the following scene as Johnny storms down the street with a

shotgun towards the Earp Brothers in an attempt to regain his standing in the saloon – or at least gain vengeance. However, before Johnny is able to shoot the Earps, Doc Holliday interjects by shouting Johnny's name. While Wyatt and his brothers are completely oblivious to the threat Johnny poses in the moment before Doc calls on him, this demonstrates how the film as a whole is structured through a form of gamble as a process that never is complete because there is always another escalation and an increase in the stakes after each risk taken. Doc's interjection also illuminates the multiplicity of relations that configure these dynamic processes as never simply a confrontation between two men – such as Johnny and Wyatt – but instead, as an increasing number of participants as well as factors that are out of any particular person's control.

Subsequently, after learning from Doc that the man who pulled him out of the saloon by his ear is Wyatt Earp, the famous lawman, Johnny concedes ("folds") to Wyatt and leaves his shotgun behind, deciding that any possible gain is not worth the risk. That being said, it is Doc who appears to have the greatest impact on this particular moment as he influences the outcome of this gamble, which otherwise may have resulted in Wyatt being shot down. Masculinities as a form of gamble also take shape throughout the film through the card playing antics of Doc Holliday and the casino games pursued by the Earp Brothers. The form as gamble also goes past these obvious connections and into the narrative structure of the film, which unfolds a series of interrelated gambles by many of the characters to advance their interests and gain success. Even though these events are configured through risks, gamble takes shape as a reading of form and by extension the form of masculinities – as opposed to a structure of risking – because not every gamble involves risk, or at least appears to be as risky as others. When there is a risk taken, it is a risk, but when there is a gamble there could be odds, or even assumed odds, that minimize or eliminate any risk – especially in a game like poker where betting with a royal flush would not

involve much, if any, risk while retaining the structure of gamble. Furthermore, gambles can lead to profits and success – which is not always the case with a risk – and having the best odds does also not guarantee a desired result as people can choose not to wager against you or other factors may lead to an unanticipated outcome. There are also a number of uncontrollable factors in a gamble that are not always implied by a risk. Uncontrollable factors compose a set of relations within a gamble between the dealer and the other players, the deck of cards or the dice, the efforts of all those involved in the game, the stakes increasing, the interconnected functioning of different human and material factors, and a multiplicity of other elements visible and invisible. It is this set of relations as the structure of a gamble that forms the masculinities in *Tombstone*.

A vibrant scene that crystallizes masculinities as a form of gamble occurs when the Earp Brothers are tending to their stake in the Oriental Saloon one night following a public theater performance. With the Earps and Doc having been in the saloon for some time, Curly Bill, Johnny Ringo, and other cowboys enter and confront Wyatt. After Wyatt assures them he is no longer a lawman, Johnny Ringo turns his attention to Doc Holliday. The interaction leads Doc to debate if he should hate Johnny or not, and he eventually decides, after conferring with his partner Kate, that he does. This leads Wyatt to insist that Doc is drunk in an attempt to dampen the insult and keep the peace within the Oriental Saloon. Given his disposition, Doc responds, "in vino veritas," to which Ringo replies back in Latin. This leads Doc to acknowledge that Johnny is an educated man like himself, which makes him really hate him. Ringo replies to this sentiment by pulling his pistol and pointing it at Doc. The exchange continues to intensify, but the film cuts from a shot of the dispute to a medium close-up of Wyatt sitting at the gambling table and then the camera tilts down to a double barrel shotgun attached to the underside of the table that he is cocking slowly. This cut to a gun, amidst an abundance of masculine posturing,

could be taken as a representation waiting to be discussed through psychoanalysis, which would no doubt highlight the phallic placement of the shotgun and how Wyatt signifies, even in this concealed manner, that he is the most powerful in the scene by his association with the phallus. While that may be true in terms of representation, it is also the case that this scene takes shape through the form of a gamble. With Ringo and Holiday already having performed a series of verbal gestures, Ringo puts on a gun-spinning display for the saloon as he stares at Doc and repeatedly points his gun at him in the process. The crowd cheers Johnny on as the camera cuts between shots with angles that highlight the sensational gun-spinning and interspliced close-ups of Wyatt and then Morgan Earp, who both appear concerned, as well as close-ups of Curly Bill and Ike Clayton looking more amused than concerned. When Ringo finally holsters his weapon, the attention then turns to Doc. As the crowd grows silent in anticipation, the film cuts to a series of close-ups with Ringo, Bill, and Ike staring with confidence as if Doc has been bested. After a close-up of Doc, the camera cuts back to the shot of the entire group and Doc begins spinning his tin-drinking cup as if it is a gun. Laughs start to emerge from the crowd, and a cut to a close-up of Johnny Ringo reveals a look of shock. There are again a series of close-ups interspliced with shots of Doc's cup-spinning that mimic the shots and angles of Johnny's gun-spinning. As Doc "holsters" his cup, a few applause and laughs can be heard, but nothing as forceful as the applause when Johnny holstered his weapon. With the Earp brothers smirking on and Doc quite pleased with himself, Johnny and Bill walk away from the table after some strained smirks and laughs of their own.

These parallel performances – Johnny Ringo's gun-spinning against Doc's cup-spinning – play on the expectation that Doc's response to Johnny's gesture will escalate the situation. The gun-spinning competition can quickly lead to the street and become a gunfight. However, by not

spinning a gun, Doc shocks not only Ringo and the crowd of onlookers but also the convention of the genre itself. This moment unleashes an intensity that can be read across the faces of those involved – especially the close-ups of Johnny Ringo and Curly Bill, who appear confused and stunned as they strain amusement. The cup-spinning also has an altering impact on the Earp Brothers, who looked concerned and troubled by the escalating stand-off between Johnny and Doc – Wyatt is shown several times cocking and aiming the gun under the table – but during the cup-spinning they look relaxed as they laugh. The cup-spinning introduces something unexpected, a new sensation that collides and disrupts an interaction headed for a gunfight that, of course, will eventually happen by the end of the film. This gesture affects and is affected by the cinematic form as it is in itself a gamble. What is clearly an escalating situation is reshaped by the cup-spinning that delays, or fractures, a gunfight that seems inevitable, but it does so through a gamble. Doc has the choice to spin a cup and not a gun because of the relations that configure the scene. One can imagine Doc being confronted by Ringo, Bill, Ike, and a number of other cowboys in a dark alley by himself. If Ringo put on a gunspinning performance in this scenario, it seems unlikely, or at the very least unwise, that Doc would respond by spinning a cup. However, at the faro table in the company of the Earp Brothers and with the knowledge of Wyatt's shotgun under the table, Doc is emboldened to take a greater risk that gives him the ability to upstage Ringo as well as prevent raising the stakes of this particular exchange to a full-out gunfight. This also demonstrates that in situations where frontier masculinity's threat of violence appears to be the only available option – the belief that Doc must pull his gun out and prove himself superior – is clearly an illusion. Furthermore, Doc's substitution of the cup for the gun illuminates the fact that codes of frontier masculine violence are not a clear pathway to power in any situation because, within this scene, the form masculinities take as a gamble

introduces an affective alternative that leaves Johnny momentarily defeated despite the fact that Doc never pulled his gun.

Against a reading of the formal dimension of *Tombstone*, and specifically this scene, an interpretation relying on the significance of representations may note that Wyatt, as the hero associated with the most dominant possession of frontier masculinity, remains disciplined and controlled throughout this scene, in keeping with the genre's conventions. As Peter Homans argues, similar to Kimmel's conceptualization of the self-made man as a manifestation of control, the Western hero is someone who displays "discipline and control" until the pending showdown with the villains (2016, 139). In this sense, Wyatt chooses not to act now because it is not the right time – even if he is prepared to do so if the villains initiate violence – in a way that recalls Munny's restraint early on in *Unforgiven* even though Little Bill beats him up in the saloon. Therefore, this method of interpretation categorizes the characters in the scene according to established traits of the Western genre. Wyatt is the hero and, as a result, the scene does not escalate because the hero is restrained in his use of frontier masculinity's violence only in the right moment – this also echoes Kimmel's conceptualization of the self-made man as a manifestation of control. This all changes near the end of the film, according to this binaristic logic and representation of masculinity, because the hero accepts the task of defeating the villain. "Now he is infused," argues Homans, "with vitality, direction, and seriousness," which he uses to enact his triumph over evil and, by extension, rid the frontier community of the evil that prevents peace and justice from blossoming (ibid. 140). Homans' discussion of the Western genre is similar to Buscombe's discussion of *Unforgiven* in terms of its reduction of the genre and representations of masculinity to oppositional characteristics. Through this reduction, the vibrant intensity of each film as a dynamic process becomes restricted as differences in degree and

differences in kind. The frontier masculinity displayed by the hero is associated with control and discipline, but the villain is contrasted as the opposite, or without these qualities. The individuating differences that structure the particularity and the specificity of each event is lost in the structure of representational oppositions.

Conversely, closely reading the form of masculinities that take shape through the dynamic processes of the formal dimension of a film seizes individuating difference that opens up force through speculation. Rather than simplifying dynamic processes as a single, general model, as Homans does – in fact, he does not even reference a single Western film in his generalizations about the genre – embracing difference in itself generates a force of masculinities as form, which has the capacity to unfold the unthought and the not yet. "It is a built-up and drawn-out affair," states Homans in reference to the final battle between the hero and the villain, "always allowing enough time for an audience to gather" (ibid. 141). While this generalization initially appears valid if we recall the final gunfights of such major Westerns such as *Stagecoach*, *High Noon*, and *The Tin Star* with the whole town watching in anticipation – a deeper interrogation of this claim in relation to Westerns reveals its shortcomings. For example, an audience watching a final gunfight between the hero and the villain in a saloon or on the street, in terms of Homans' model, is absent when we consider Westerns such as *Dodge City* (Curtiz 1939), *Winchester '73* (Mann 1950), *Shane*, *The Naked Spur* (Mann 1953), *7 Men from Now*, and *Ride the High Country* (Peckinpah 1962). Therefore, should one question whether or not these films are Westerns? Or, how about the climaxes of *Frontier Marshal* (Dwan 1939), *Red River* (Hawks 1948), or *Bend of the River* (Mann 1952)? Surely these films are Westerns even if the hero and villain do not have a gunfight that ends with the hero besting the villain, as a representation of evil, with a bullet. Does it make sense to try and claim that *Shane* or *Red River*

are revisionist just because they do not align with Homans' generalization of what the Western genre is? Furthermore, while this is only a small sample of films, such a universal and singular claim about the characteristics of a genre is not only misplaced – it treats a common occurrence, a gunfight between a hero and a villain viewed by an audience, as an overwhelmingly dominant narrative convention from which Westerns rarely stray – it also denies the individuating differences of each film. While even *Stagecoach*, *High Noon*, and *The Tin Star* all align with this general model, the differences within each film are strikingly particular and specific. Therefore, making this assumption about gunfights can only serve to establish a socio-cultural significance through a representational approach that categorizes films according to established ideas and binary choices. At best, even if we follow Homans' structuralist claim, all of the examples mentioned that do not fit his model become sorted as what they are not – not the model – or a revision, which also denies the individuating differences of these films even through the admission that they are different in kind, or at least different kinds of Westerns in terms of being diverse from a dominant model – in this case, Homans'.

What becomes apparent is that Homans' structuralist approach generalizes Western narratives in an attempt to speak to the socio-cultural significance of the genre as a whole as opposed to the unique narrative circumstances of individual Westerns, not to mention a reading for forms. "Indeed, in the gunfight (and to a lesser extent in the minor temptation episodes) the hero's heightened gravity and dedicated exclusion of all other loyalties present a study in puritan virtue," states Homans, "while the evil one presents nothing more nor less than the old New England Protestant devil – strangely costumed, to be sure – the traditional tempter whose horrid lures never allow the good puritan a moment's peace" (ibid. 145-146). The generalization that Homans proposes is a means to make a grand binaristic claim that sorts every hero and villain of

the Western according to an oppositional choice between puritan and Protestant values – or as a revision of this opposition. Rather than parse out the narrative divergences that compose the final conflict between heroes and villains in the Western genre, Homans is interested in using a structuralist approach to produce an overarching binary model that distorts the particularity and the specificity of each Western by applying a preexisting, manufactured category that accounts for the meaning of the entire genre. Moving beyond this generalization, closely reading for the forms of masculinities reveals the unique conditions that configure each film as an event rather than assuming a film as a static reflection of binaristic logic. The ensuing force that is generated by my reading of the masculinities in *Tombstone* as a form of gamble purposely eschews representations by not reducing the film to a general model of the Western genre – as some grand schema or as having an overarching significance – and instead pursues the vibrant intensities through which its individuating difference takes shape. Therefore, in *Tombstone* Wyatt's masculinity becomes a form of gamble through the dynamic process of the film rather than a fixed point associated with the characteristics of Kimmel's self-made man and ideals of frontier masculinity.

Specifically, the many gunfights (because *Tombstone* has more than one between heroes and villains, which already undoes Homans' model) are structured as gambles. When Wyatt and the other Earp brothers ride into town, this is already a chance taken because they do not come to Tombstone with any guarantee of fortune or success, but merely hope or desire. The Earps encounter more than they expected because the outlaw gang – the cowboys – have a far-reaching influence within Tombstone, including an influence on the law as well as government. Consequently, every action undertaken by Wyatt, Morgan, Virgil, and even Doc becomes shaped by their attempt to profit and find success in Tombstone, which the cowboys put in jeopardy.

Through a close reading of masculinities as a form of gamble, even Virgil's choice to become the new marshal, following the murder of Fred White, is structured by the same chance undertaken by the Earps initial arrival in Tombstone with the hope of financial gain. "Hold on nothing," exclaims Virgil in response to Wyatt's objection that he has taken the vacant marshal position. "I walk around town and look these people in the eyes," continues Virgil, "it is just like someone is slapping me in the face. These people are afraid to walk down the street and I am trying to make money off that like some goddamn vulture. If we are going to have a future in this town it has got to have some law and order." This choice Virgil makes – to become marshal – is not simply a representation of puritan virtue and it does not quite fit as a representation of Kimmel's self-made man either. Virgil's choice does not fit these categories because his interest in profit complicates the puritan category and by extension Buscombe's discussion of violence and frontier masculinity because the hero is to use violence to purge evil and then leave the community himself, but the Earps have no plan to leave. In addition, his choice does not align with a representation of Kimmel's self-made man because he has a vested interest in other people's well-being beyond his own – Virgil and the Earps could easily continue to profit without helping anyone else. Furthermore, Virgil's choice is not even the representation of a gamble. In order to be a representation of a gamble, or puritan virtue, or the self-made man, or a frontier hero who is using violence to purge evil from a community, Virgil – as well as the other Earp brothers – would need to be static characters that repeat the same stable point during the film. Conversely, as *Tombstone's* narrative takes shape before and after Virgil's choice to become marshal, there is no consistency other than a dynamic process as a form of gamble – the Earp brothers attempt to make a fortune in Tombstone. Therefore, Virgil's choice is not simply a choice in isolation or a

fixed element that signifies an ideal of frontier masculinity, and instead it transforms the relations within *Tombstone* as it affects and is affected by those relations in an ongoing process.

Masculinities as a form of gamble take shape throughout the film, as related and unrelated chances are undertaken in an attempt to secure success – whether the Earps' desire for financial gain or the cowboys' desire to remain in control of *Tombstone*. This dynamic process continuously structures the film and raises the stakes between the cowboys and the Earps beyond Virgil's becoming marshal, Doc's cup-spinning, and Wyatt's confrontation with Johnny Tyler, there are incessant gambles that structure masculinities in the film. For example, the shootout at the O. K. Corral is an attempt by both the cowboys and the Earps to take the upper hand. In these moments, either an Earp or the Earp group (or in other situations it is a cowboy or the cowboys' gang) makes a grand gesture, only to have the other side respond and try to beat that gesture through one of its own. This is exactly what unfolds in the confrontation between Johnny and Doc in the saloon that starts with gun-spinning and ends with cup-spinning, but masculinities as a form undoes the deception of the self-made man by stressing the relations necessary to sustain the illusion that a single source of masculinity could control the entire outcome. To put it bluntly: Doc does not act alone and he is not self-made. Furthermore, Wyatt Earp does not act alone in the film despite his representation as a self-made man and frontier masculinity par excellence, the dominant or hegemonic model of masculinity within the Western genre. Masculinities as a form as gamble opens up the dependency of any given man – and, by extension, any given body within the film – on a multiplicity of interactions and forces, which is evident in the visualization of the relations that structure any given confrontation or event. In particular, in the gun-spinning scene, it is clear that neither Johnny nor Doc simply act in isolation. Johnny Ringo may be heralded as the greatest gun since Wild Bill, but his actions in the saloon are clearly predicated

on the support he receives from the other cowboys – predominantly, Curly Bill and Ike Clayton – that provide the potential to undertake chance that would be more risky if he were alone. In particular, the editing in this scene emphasizes these relations by continuously cutting to the various cowboys that are supporting Johnny and to the threats that Doc and the Earps pose. Johnny does not walk into the saloon by himself. There are a multiplicity of forces and relations that shape masculinities as a gamble that is only ever the illusion of control – one of Kimmel's primary characteristics of the self-made man – which becomes evident as the stakes intensify in Tombstone. Wyatt does not have the ability to control the escalating gamble in Tombstone, and instead, his masculinity is shaped through the various events of the gamble, including the death of his brother Morgan and the loss of his brother Virgil's arm.

Even as Wyatt chases down the cowboys at the end of the film in search of vengeance, he never takes on the cowboys without the support of his friend – not to mention the use of a gun and horse. There is a complex set of relations that influences Wyatt's ability to seek vengeance, which always remains out of his control because all it takes is the misfire of a gun in the wrong moment or a cowboy unexpectedly hiding behind a corner to end Wyatt's chances. As discussed earlier, Doc's cup-spinning is also supported by a set of relations, which is shaped by Wyatt's gun under the table as well as Morgan Earp standing by his side. Again, the editing of this scene demonstrates the complex relations that unfold this exchange of gestures as both Doc and Johnny gamble on the fact that the allegiance of the Earp group is stronger. When confronted by the threat of a gun in a saloon scene earlier in the film, Doc does not spin his drinking cup, but he does gamble by setting his guns on the table because a different set of relations is able to sustain this gamble. This occurs after Doc has won a poker hand and his opponent Ed confronts him and implies he cheated. Though Doc pulls his guns, as opposed to his drinking cup, he eventually

sets the guns on the table, which invites a physical confrontation with Ed and he stabs him with a concealed knife. However, it is important to note how this gamble is structured, as Kate's presence provides the necessary support that influences the gamble to unfold favorably for both Doc and Kate. Before Doc wins the hand against Ed, Kate takes a position next to the saloon's bartender, which in the moment seems rather meaningless. Yet, as the gamble unfolds it is revealed that Kate is a crucial force in what may otherwise be represented as the self-made heroic action of Doc because Kate pulls a gun on the bartender to prevent him from using a shotgun to stop the dispute. Again, it is possible to read the representation of Doc and Ringo as similar because neither man is the epitome of the frontier hero. Obviously, Ringo is a villain in the film, but Doc, despite being friends with Wyatt and aiding him, is in a more nefarious position given his propensity for excessive drinking, poker playing, and mischief. Doc is certainly not to be interpreted as the quintessential frontier hero, but he does uphold many codes of frontier masculinity, as does Ringo. However, Wyatt as the representation of the quintessential frontier hero becomes undone through a close reading of masculinities as a form of gamble because Wyatt's actions are never completely detached from a support system. This fact becomes evident as the stakes are raised and the confrontation between the Earp group and the cowboys accelerates. It is initially a chance Wyatt refuses to make – he tries to stop his brothers from becoming lawmen – but it is not his decision alone and the forces put in motion by Doc as well as his brothers pull Wyatt into the dispute and eventually becoming a lawman himself is the influence that allows his gamble to pay off. Yet, this is not the payoff of financial success that the Earps hoped for, but instead the outcome is vengeance for Morgan's death and the loss of Virgil's arm that materializes through the killing of many cowboys.

That being said, it is difficult to overlook the ending of *Tombstone* that is strikingly similar to the end of *The Last of the Mohicans* where the romantic union of Wyatt and Josephine concludes the film. Also, Wyatt, like Nathaniel, stands as a cowboy hero who overcomes the villains against all odds. Therefore, Nathaniel and Wyatt, as well as many of the other characters in these two Westerns, could be interpreted as representing frontier masculinity and the self-made man. The narrative organization of these films offers neat conclusions that can be associated with masculine triumph through the use of frontier masculinity, which concludes with the hero standing victorious with a love interest. It would be problematic to claim either *Tombstone* or *The Last of the Mohicans* somehow represent a different mode of frontier masculinity or an alternative to the self-made man because, if observed as static and fixed elements to be sorted through a binaristic logic, then Wyatt and Nathaniel – as well as Little Jo in *The Ballad of Little Jo* and Munny in *Unforgiven* – are examples of masculinity molding the wildness of the frontier into their desired goals. However, reading masculinities as a form of gamble in *Tombstone* unfolds a force with the capacity to generate alternative conceptualizations that foreground the interconnectivity shaping any experience of masculinity. Speculatively reading the cinematic form of these Westerns as vibrant intensities generates pathways that understand masculinities as relations – whether it is through structures of resistance, or through stark configurations, or through forms of contrast, or through the shaping of a gamble – that launches a creative force where no man is ever simply self-made. This potential is expressed in the reading of masculinities as forms, which illuminate that masculinities are always interconnected within processes of a nature-culture continuum and dependent on their enmeshed relations to persist. Although the narratives of these Westerns can be interpreted as upholding the myth of the frontier hero and the self-made man as hegemonic models of masculinity, my close

reading of the formal dimension of these Westerns launches speculation with the capacity to question the monolithic and individualistic claims this myth attempts to disseminate as well as to unfold new conceptualizations of masculinities yet to come.

Reading the cinematic form of Western films from the 1990s against the views of mythopoetic masculinity and the myth of the self-made man reveals an undermining potential by foregrounding that masculinities are always in relation. Not only are masculinities always constructed through socio-cultural and gender relations, as I outlined through Connell's work in Chapter One, but they are always already in ongoing processes of relations that affect and are affected by other bodies. Through the force unfolded by the close reading of masculinities as forms, the frontier becomes conceptualized as merely an environment in which masculinities enter relations, and as a location that contains no essential qualities for masculine power. By exploring a nature-culture continuum rather than binaristic logic, the wilderness is understood as no better suited to the needs of masculine subjectivities than urban environments. If there is an essence to masculinities, it is a destabilized, non-hierarchal process that relies on interconnections with other bodies – other male, human, nonhuman animal, mineral, vegetal, and imaginary bodies. The relations and forms these processes take is always open, but, as discussed, overlooking these processes can be toxic and problematic because it results in the assumption that a self constructs an identity as well as a future. This can lead to the restriction and limitation of relations and forces that sustain life. Without acknowledging the interconnections masculinities have in their embeddedness in a nature-culture continuum, masculine subjectivities cannot overcome violent tendencies and self-destruction. However, rather than confront the ideals of masculinity that continuously defer and deny embodiment, many men seek to blame

others for failures that are inherently built into the modes of masculinity they embrace – a consequence I explore further this in the next chapter.

- CHAPTER FOUR -

The Masculine Crisis Film: Masculinities as a Force of Becoming

"The film academic is likely to search out the contradictions of capitalism or the crisis of masculinity (evidently one of the longest-running crises in history)"

- David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 104.

"We're pumping up and working out obsessively to make our bodies impervious masculine machines, carving and sculpting these bodily works-in-progress, while we adorn ourselves with signifiers of a bygone era of unchallenged masculinity, donning Stetson cologne, Chaps clothing, and Timberland boots as we drive our Cherokees and Denalis to conquer the urban jungle"

- Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 216.

Frustration: Falling Down (Schumacher 1993)

Joel Schumacher's *Falling Down*, about the out of work William Foster (also known as D-FENS due to his personalized license plate), encapsulates the issues that make up the masculine crisis discourse of the 1990s. Without a job and also separated from his wife and child through a restraining order from the courts, Foster takes a violent path across Los Angeles in an attempt to regain a sense of power and assert a position of authority. Discussing representations of masculinity in contemporary American cinema, Gates says that Michael Douglas "performed the ultimate masculinity-in-crisis in *Falling Down*, portraying unemployed defense worker William Foster/D-Fens, who cracks and retaliates against the society that he sees as flawed" (2006, 108). This retaliation becomes an array of violent acts committed against anyone and anything that symbolizes, for Foster, an impediment to his pursuit of power and authority. In this discussion of *Falling Down*, I map how scholars interpret the film through binaristic logic and the recognition of representations before transitioning to my reading masculinities as a form of frustration.

It is possible to interpret Foster's masculinity as representing a general male angst and rage that stem from a masculine crisis in the 1990s, which developed from the perception that the average man had lost the privileges available to men in previous eras. "The turn of the twenty-first century," Kimmel argues, "finds American men increasingly angry, not anxious. To be sure, American men's anxieties about demonstrating and proving masculinity remain unabated. But American men are also angry" (2006, 217). *Falling Down* can be interpreted as signifying these budding tensions and misplaced rage. Furthermore, Foster can be associated with the failures of Kimmel's notion of the self-made man (as discussed in the previous chapter), which promises ideals that continuously defer and deny embodiment. These failures are internalized as personal inadequacy as opposed to an outward critique of a patriarchal discourse that perpetuates these ideals by supporting and being supported by a mode of masculinity. In order to abate this feeling of inadequacy and failure, violent acts become a means of reasserting or proving the validity of one's masculinity. Foster looks within himself, like many other men unable to grasp the promises of Kimmel's notion of self-made masculinity, before eventually lashing out in an attempt to reclaim a masculine subjectivity he was never able to embody to begin with. Faced with an unrealized desire to be recognized as a figure of power and authority, Foster furiously pursues an externalized vengeance against anyone and anything he views as responsible for his failures to prove his masculinity rather than confronting the inward destruction of a self-made masculinity and a patriarchal discourse. This sense of masculine crisis becomes revisited many times by other films in the 1990s, which portray men's perception of internal inadequacy as well as their external pursuits of retribution and violent acts that prove their masculinity.

Foster feels entitled to a position of authority and he wants the rewards of success that he feels should come with the efforts he has made as a worker and in familial life, even if his view

is obviously flawed. He believes society should respond to his desires, needs, and ideas. Kimmel outlines that, "specifically, it is those American men – white, native-born, middle and lower-middle class – who were the rank and file of our historical march of self-made masculinity who have become the angriest" (ibid.). Foster is precisely at this nexus of being and the epitome of external anger throughout the film. Whether his anger is to be attributed to an inability to achieve the ideals of self-made masculinity or some other notion of masculinity, it is clear that Foster wants to prove himself according to an antiquated mode of masculinity. "D-Fens's motive, as his journey 'home' attests," states Bruzzi, "is to recapture that which he has lost, namely a masculinity predicated upon professional and domestic security" (2005, 154). Through the interpretations of Bruzzi and Gates as well as Kimmel's historical framing of masculinities in the 1990s, *Falling Down* can be understood as signifying a socio-cultural view of masculinity in crisis that is represented by Foster's inability to align the ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity with his lived experiences. The narrative of the film follows an increasingly angry Foster who uses a succession of progressively violent actions in an attempt to assert himself into the subject position he believes he should occupy – a powerful, successful, respected, and authoritative man. However, what Foster encounters through his violent outbursts is that he is only able to achieve that position through the threat of violence, which is unsustainable because the threat can only be held so long before action is required and law enforcement catches up to him. In addition, following his outbursts of violence, Foster often expresses regret and claims he is not a bad guy, which demonstrates how violence taints the status he so deeply desires. In light of Foster's violent actions and attempts to assert his masculinity, Bruzzi argues that the film exemplifies "the convincing arguments Susan Faludi proposes in *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man* (1999) for the crisis in masculinity" (ibid.). Following this interpretation of the

film's representation of masculinity, the significance of *Falling Down* is connected to the notion that it reflects similar socio-cultural issues surrounding masculinity in the 1990s. The main issue that underpins this significance is the anger that men feel because a mode of masculinity they are attempting to embody is no longer supported within a transforming socio-cultural landscape. The basic claim made by this interpretation is that Foster represents a man who is unable to change with a transforming society, and, in response to the misalignment that arises from this inability to change, he feels angry and tries to use violence to make things how he wants them to be.

At the core of this notion of masculine crisis associated with *Falling Down* by these interpretations is an understanding of Foster's representation of masculinity as a succession of acts attempting to retrieve or prove his manhood, which he feels has been taken from him or lost. "This image of flailing men who belatedly discovered that society had changed around them and who no longer knew what their role in life was," states Bruzzi, "is encapsulated in D-Fens' journey towards a lost manhood he once thought he owned" (ibid.). There are two points that Bruzzi's analysis introduces: Foster represents masculinity in crisis, and, more importantly, the masculinity he is trying to prove and recapture was never actually embodied by him – he only thought he owned it. This highlights the fleeting trait of any ideal of masculinity because, as discussed in Chapter One in relation to *The Big Lebowski*, there is no possibility for a finite definition of masculinity that remains stable and fixed. Therefore, Foster encounters a slipping between ideals and reality not simply because the socio-cultural landscape has changed in this individual instance, but because it is always changing. There is always already transformation of subjectivities, of the gender order, of the socio-cultural landscape, and of life itself because existence is a dynamic process. Consequently, clinging to and trying to reassert a moment or identity that has passed is to make an error in assuming that moment or identity was ever actually

occupied, and to think existence as a linear movement of development towards and away from a set and fixed goal. Foster's experience of transformation is not the unique experience of a man adhering to an antiquated mode of masculinity, but rather, a process that is life as change. It would be mistaken to understand Foster as an individual point caught in the flux of a monolithic transformation because so many other aspects, including both human and nonhuman bodies, are undergoing alterations around him as well. The issue that arises for Foster parallels the error that interpretations of the film also make by assuming he is the only subject position adverse to, or out of sorts as a result of, a changing socio-cultural landscape.

I am establishing this on the basis of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming, which understands existence as continuous transformation and creation that does not adhere to any specific plan or predetermined development. Conversely, they view being (distinct from becoming) as an attempt to make sense of this chaos by identifying things that appear to be similar from moment to moment and then assuming those things to be the same, which manufactures the illusion of stability and a knowable self – a position that remains the same. It is a misreading to assume that Deleuze and Guattari seek to completely dismantle the subject position or that they are aiming to demonstrate that it does not exist because they do acknowledge that the manufacturing of an image of a self is an inevitable outcome of existence. However, their goal is to map how this self is an illusion as it is a strategy that allows for the perseverance of subjectivity amidst existence as continuous transformations. Therefore, an overreliance on this illusion or assuming this illusion to be the actual conditions of existence is a flawed understanding of life that can lead to duress, which is why they map becoming to counter-balance the illusion of a stable self. Furthermore, I read Deleuze and Guattari as advocating for a mode of becoming that recognizes this fact of life – as change and as creation –

and that intermittingly embraces transformation to varying degrees as a positive process while adhering less to the illusion of a stable and fixed self. "A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit," state Deleuze and Guattari, "an identification. The whole structuralist critique of the series seems irrefutable. To become is not to progress or regress along a series. Above all, becoming does not occur in the imagination" (2004, 262). In this passage, Deleuze and Guattari launch a critique against a humancentric notion of existence that assumes humans control and process the world through their minds as it unfolds in a set pattern or natural progression. To replace this notion of existence, they stress the unknowable conditions as well as the specificity and the particularity of each unfolding moment as difference in itself, which also rejects any view of existence as a development or a building of an identity that traverses forwards and backwards in an attempt to obtain a set goal. Like the notion of a stable self, Deleuze and Guattari also view the notion of development that takes life as a finite and linear progression – as well as possible regressions – as an illusion manufactured to make sense of the actual chaos that is existence in all of its infinite and deviating unfolding. "Becoming produces nothing other than itself" (ibid.). In this sense, existence is embraced as transformation that is unknowable and uncontrollable in advance, which celebrates a materialization of the new and the unthought as crucial sparks of life and perseverance – at least in my reading of Deleuze and Guattari back through Spinoza.

By shifting from being to becoming, existence is understood as a dynamic process that continuously experiments with and seeks out new experiences and unthought perspectives. "Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own," state Deleuze and Guattari; "it does not reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling,' or 'producing'" (ibid. 263). In this manner, becoming is distinct and it reveals existence as indeterminate because the outcomes of

transformations can never be guaranteed in advance and transformations themselves are always unique, multiple, and ongoing, which conceptualizes existence as something we are in the midst of – rather than in control of – and something that requires we continuously find new relations that increase our capacity to persevere. This involves affects, as discussed in Chapter One, because a capacity to persevere is stimulated by our power to affect and be affected by other bodies, which can be as simple as the consumption of food or be as complex as the relations that motivate our interest in existence itself. However, following Deleuze and Guattari through Spinoza, continuing to persevere also demands that we maintain some semblance that is separate from the rest of the world. Even if the notion of this semblance is an illusion that assumes a boundary between a self and the world despite the actual porousness of bodies and the multiplicity of assemblages working within and on any body, perseverance as a thing is to be maintained or else we would be lost completely within becoming in a process Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize as becoming-imperceptible. This unfolds not as a production of becoming-imperceptible but rather as the realization of the actual conditions of existence that exposes that we are not separate in any way from the rest of an ongoing transformation of existence. "You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight," state Deleuze and Guattari, "yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributes that reconstitute a subject – anything you like, from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions" (ibid. 10). Therefore, following Deleuze and Guattari here, there is little risk that we will suddenly fall into a becoming-imperceptible because to do so requires a lot of effort as there are so many systems that have emerged as sites that capture the potentialities and intensities of becoming and feed off the production of bodies as a means of perseverance. For this reason, they advocate for increased embracing of becoming as a means to

combat the limiting and restricting powers that mold our bodies into appearing, being, equaling, and producing for their benefit.

Returning to *Falling Down* through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming, it is apparent that Foster is caught up in an insistence on being as a linear development and he is attempting to push society back towards a point where he can feel more complete, in terms of grasping a position of manhood that, in Bruzzi's terms, is now lost. However, this also assumes that society has changed and that he has remained a stable and fixed point that has been left behind, which interprets his masculinity as consistent – at least the characteristics of his masculinity – and it is only society that no longer leaves a place for this mode of masculinity. From his perspective, society is understood as flawed in Gates' terms. Foster's experience in the film is then associated with a crisis in masculinity because his antiquated mode of masculinity can no longer find a proper place within a transforming socio-cultural landscape. Moreover, even when masculinities are understood as in fluctuation – not stable or fixed, as Gates conceptualizes – a crisis of masculinity remains the notion that structures an interpretation of the film. Foster is experiencing a crisis of masculinity or not – again, as discussed throughout this dissertation, film theory lacks the capacity to read masculinity that is not simply framed as masculinity or not. Through a binaristic logic, the particularity and the specificity of Foster's masculinity and *Falling Down* as a dynamic process is reduced to representations that are organized according to an oppositional choice – a crisis of masculinity or not. My close reading for forms generates the capacity to move beyond this binary in order to interrogate the taking shape of masculinities in the film as they affect and are affected by the notion of a masculine crisis, among other influences and relations. In *Falling Down*, masculinities are a form of frustration that take shape

through the confrontation of the anxieties and anger of American men amidst the crumbling myths of Kimmel's self-made man as an antiquated mode of masculinity.

Closely reading *Falling Down* as a form of frustration generates the potential to open up new conceptualizations of masculinities as a force of becoming as inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy. This force refuses to be contained by the recognition of representation that is organized by binaristic logic, which assumes a film to be a fixed and stable text that can be sorted according to preexisting categories. For example, Nicola Rehling claims that *Falling Down* represents Robert Bly's mythopoetic remasculinization through the character of Prendergast (the police officer who tracks down Foster), who is a "soft man" that "finds the 'wild man' within" (2009, 33). The oppositional logic of Rehling's interpretation views Foster as a negative representation of masculinity that is countered by Prendergast who is understood as performing a remasculinization that is similar to Munny in *Unforgiven*. In this sense, violence is given the same significance as in binaristic approaches to the Western film genre, which frames some violence (the actions of Prendergast) as necessary and warranted. Furthermore, aligning with my discussion in Chapter Three, Rehling argues that the ending of *Falling Down* reworks the Western genre because the violence enacted by a wild masculinity is regenerative for the community (ibid.). Consequently, the particularity and the specificity of the configuration of masculinities in the film are reduced to similarities they have with preexisting categories of masculinity and violence. Even when this type of interpretation appears to be outlining a new category of masculinity through connections to previous notions of masculinity – such as masculinity as represented in the Western genre – it is always an understanding of masculinity as universal and general. "*Falling Down* is a landmark film," states Rehling, "for highlighting that white heterosexual masculinity can now function as a specific, extra-ordinary, politicized

identity in the U.S. rather than just the invisible norm, albeit through the inscription of white male victimhood" (ibid. 35). For Rehling, Foster and Prendergast only reflect the conditions of preexisting issues that can be understood as having socio-cultural significance – the issue of male victimhood – but this offers little if any contemplation of the dynamic processes that condition the structuring of these masculinities as unique events. Bruzzi also echoes a similar response, stating, "*Falling Down* is notable for showing the average white family man as social victim" (2005, 153). Conversely, my close reading of the forms of masculinities in *Falling Down* actively thinks the taking shape of these dynamic processes as a configuring of frustration.

The opening scene of *Falling Down* formally introduces D-Fens' skewed perception as he sits in a traffic jam. Within the heat of the summer, the form – visible especially through the cinematic form of the mise-en-scène – takes shape as frustration, which begins to unfold through D-Fens' struggles to control the temperature in his car as he aggressively turns the window crank and knocks the air conditioning knob back and forth. The scene continues to be structured by processes of frustration, which includes a fly that escapes Foster's attempts to kill it, the swirling noises of the surrounding traffic, and the experience of sitting within the gridlock of vehicles. Masculinities as a form of frustration take shape through the intensities that unfold when an internal breaking point is reached in response to situations that escape Foster's as well as other characters' control. Not only is Foster frustrated with himself and his current situation, but also the film is structured through frustration as complex relations and progressions, which arise when reality does not align with Foster's clinging to the ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity. More than simply retaliation against a flawed society, as Gates discusses, masculinities are forms produced by frustration when taken to be a set of ideals, which is illuminated by D-Fens' violent outbursts against others and the systems he deems counter-

productive to his masculine ideals related to a position of power and authority. After all, his frustration is not an intensely personal experience bound up with his internal feelings of impotence and his skewed perception of reality as a series of external threats because it also affects and is affected by his relations in any given moment. In this sense, the film is a form of frustration that is also evident in Beth's (D-Fens' ex-wife) experiences because Foster's masculinity affects and is affected by a relation to her. Through his calling, his lingering threat that he is coming home, the lack of assistance from the police, and the additional stress of her daughter's birthday, even the scenes with Beth are structured through processes of frustration as she goes through experiences of being annoyed, upset, and feeling an inability to change or control the unfolding situation.

Masculinities as a form of frustration are introduced immediately in the opening sequence that recalls the opening of *8½* (Fellini 1963) – another film tangled in frustration – as the mise-en-scène is littered with reminders of D-Fens' inability to achieve. The sequence advances through his bombardment with the issues he cannot overcome, let alone gain control over. All of these pressures push on him within the opening of the film as the camera circles around him capturing the symphony of his shortcomings, from obvious markers like a bumper sticker reminding him of his failed financial position, to less explicit associations, such as the young girl that resembles Adele, his daughter from whom he is estranged, or the businessmen in an adjacent car who help sustain the corporate structures that make Foster economically unviable. The form takes shape through frustration over and over again as D-Fens enters into situations and contacts that remind him of his inability to achieve the ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity (related to Kimmel's notion of the self-made man) and he struggles, but ultimately fails, to gain control. Ultimately, as he thrashes at a fly, it becomes apparent that clinging to the ideals of an

antiquated mode of masculinity and refusing to reimagine himself through a sense of becoming configures his masculinity as a form of frustration. Through this form, Foster uses violence as the only possible way for him to try and gain control. For Chuck Kleinhans, *Falling Down* is a reflection of the socio-cultural landscape of the 1990s. "The film encapsulates widespread social tensions of the time," argue Kleinhans: "high unemployment, loss of the familial corporation that respected age and experience, large immigrant presence in urban areas, fear of feminism, escalating lawlessness from police and gangs" (2008, 101-102). All of these tensions identified by Kleinhans are intimately tied to the ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity related to Kimmel's notion of the self-made man and understood as having an effect on the experiences of men encountering a changing socio-cultural landscape. However, this offers no insight into processes through which Foster's masculinity takes shape – let alone the subjectivities of other characters in the film – and instead, Kleinhans interprets the film as being a static and fixed text with socio-cultural significance. Like Bruzzi and Rehling, Kleinhans assumes Foster is an unchanging point of masculinity amidst a transforming socio-cultural landscape rather than reading Foster as part of a dynamic process of transformation, which has already and continues to transform him whether or not he resists this change.

It is important to reiterate the opening sequence is an unfolding of these tensions as a structure of frustration that pushes on D-Fens and configures his masculinity. After failing to kill the fly, he stares forward at the young girl in the car in front of him and in a shot-reverse shot the camera shakily zooms in tight on Foster's face, which advances the scene by emphasizing Foster's inability to control his life. The film then cuts to a series of shots that once again focus on the visual markers of his shortcomings, but now the shots are much closer and tighter, with a more specific focus – such as the woman's mouth applying lipstick – or obscuring the masculine

markers themselves – such as the partial visibility of the bumper sticker. To return to the form of masculinities, through the formal structure of the editing, D-Fens' masculinity takes shape through frustration arising within situations he cannot control or achieve what he wants, which produces his distorted perception of reality and leads to his use of violence in an attempt to overcome this force of frustration. Even the title of the film illuminates Foster's inability to achieve, which propels his experiences through annoyance and distress. "If the promise of 'self-made' masculinity was the possibility of unlimited upward mobility," Kimmel states, "its dark side was the nightmarish possibility of equally unstoppable downward mobility" (2006, 218). In this respect, falling down can be interpreted as a nightmare because unless men reject the ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity and seek new modes of becoming then violence is the only means to ward off feelings of defeat.

Masculinities as a form of frustration illuminate the failures that D-Fens perceives and his unwillingness to question the masculine ideals to which he clings. In many of the encounters he has throughout his walk home across Los Angeles, he refuses to comply with rules or procedures not because he is unable to understand them, but because he views them as detrimental to his goal of returning society to a time gone by – especially in the most trivial of circumstances. At the core of Foster's masculinity taking shape through frustration is his opinion that the rules should not apply to him. For Grant, the film represents the "anxieties of an affluent culture in an era of prolonged recession and the consequent perceived threats especially to masculinity incited by changing gender relations in the same period" (2011, 156). This interpretation identifies how misplaced D-Fens' desire for control and authority are because society is not flawed. Rather, D-Fens finds himself amidst an ongoing transformation of gender and other relations. Reluctant to embrace existence as continuously changing and clinging to the illusion that he could somehow

embody a fixed masculinity that exerts stable power and control, Foster's masculinity takes shape through processes of frustration as he fails to embody the ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity, which are continuously deferred and denied. "These challenges to masculinity," Grant continues, "are perhaps most explicit in *Falling Down* (1993), in which 'D-Fens' (Michael Douglas), as his name suggests, feels overwhelmingly besieged as a male breadwinner" (ibid).

From the Korean storeowner that Foster thinks charges too much for his soda to the female fast-food server that informs him they do not serve breakfast after 11:30 am, D-Fens sees obstacles keeping him from achieving self-made masculinity rather than considering himself to be within a changing socio-cultural landscape. Masculinities as a form of frustration take shape through Foster's inability to control any given instance of transformation in which he is not confused or victimized, but simply faced with continuous change as are all the other characters. The soda for which the Korean storeowner supposedly overcharges does not prevent Foster's survival, and is instead just an inconvenience and a part of changing economic conditions. Likewise, the fast-food server informs D-Fens that he can order off the lunch menu if he wants something to eat, which demonstrates the issue has nothing to do with survival (the need for food); rather, it has everything to do with control. Events leading to Foster's violent outbursts are merely everyday experiences that the average person has in a cityscape undergoing processes of continuous change – traffic jams, interactions with diverse populations, encounters with homeless people, and new rules within organizations and businesses. However, in response to his inability to control the experiences and get the outcome that he feels entitled to, whether in terms of a cheaper soda or breakfast, Foster relies more and more on violence in a misplaced attempt to stop the transformations he is experiencing. This is not a crisis of masculinity; this is a temper tantrum. By closely reading for the forms of masculinities within *Falling Down*, the notion of a

masculine crisis is revealed to be too general an application because the specificity and the particularity of Foster's masculinity takes shape through processes of frustration. Only the representation of Foster's masculinity within a fixed and stable text could be interpreted as having socio-cultural significance in this binaristic logic of crisis or not, which I argue against.

Interpreting the narrative of *Falling Down*, as well as the narratives of other films I discuss below as masculine crisis films, as a representation of masculinity in crisis or not remains within a discussion of socio-cultural significance rather than reading for the forms of masculinities to open up a force that generates speculation about masculinities as a force of becoming. Furthermore, interpretations such as Rehling's and Bruzzi's manufacture the possibility of male victimization as a stable point lost within contemporary socio-cultural transformations, which contribute to a general and universal sense of masculine crisis that denies the unique and dynamic processes of each event. "The film may very easily be read," argues Richard Dyer, "as an allegory of the death of the white man, or at any rate, the white man as endangered species" (1997, 217). However, understanding Foster as representing a masculinity that is deflated and threatened does not take into account the specificity and the particularity of the violent acts within the film other than sorting them according to an oppositional logic of positive and negative. In this sense, Foster's violent acts, like the villains in a Western, are seen as negative and outlaw, which is contrasted with Prendergast's violent act as regenerative or heroic, as Rehling discusses. Through a reading of masculinities as a form of frustration, it becomes apparent that it is only because Foster clings to an antiquated mode of masculinity that he relies on violent acts in any given situation. For example, he only needs to become violent with the Korean storeowner if he refuses to be creative – he could easily look for an item that costs 50 cents and he would have his change without violence. Furthermore, we see him give up

his briefcase to the homeless man after refusing to give it to young men that demanded it in the park, which demonstrates that Foster's masculinity takes shape as frustration when he is not in control and some external assemblage of relations reveal a situation that is different from what he knows or likes.

There are other possibilities, but throughout the film as a form of frustration events take shape through his inability to exert power and authority. Foster adheres desperately to the ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity and he rejects transformation and denies any likelihood that he is at fault – repeatedly saying he is not the bad guy. "If *Falling Down* is Bill/Douglas's film," Dyer states, "then it may be felt to articulate the idea that whiteness, especially white masculinity, is under threat, decentred, angry, keying in to an emergent discourse of the 1990s" (ibid. 222). Dyer does not commit to this interpretation of the film's socio-cultural significance, but it points to a powerful product of this masculine crisis discourse: men as a perceived victim and stable point against the transformations of a socio-cultural milieu. This masculine crisis discourse takes shape through processes of frustration in *Falling Down*, which configures, in part, through Foster's acts of violence, which he justifies by projecting a notion of man as victim. Therefore, by closely reading for the forms of masculinities in *Falling Down* as well as *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999) and *American Beauty* (Mendes 1999) below in connection with *The Big Lebowski*, I map the processes that affect and are affected by the masculinities taking shape within these films. This reading occurs in relation to a discourse of masculine crisis and violence as a defense of patriarchal hierarchy to conceptualize masculinities as a force of becoming with the capacity to embrace life as continuous transformation and existence as a multiplicity of uncontrollable chaos. In the remainder of the chapter, I examine further the discourse of masculinity in crisis from both a cinema studies and a masculinities perspective. Then I

transition to a discussion of how this discourse intersects with film genre, which allows me to conceptualize a masculine crisis film cycle (composed of films that transcend generic boundaries) and read for the forms of masculinities in *Fight Club* and *American Beauty*.

The Masculine Crisis Discourse

In the 1990s, the notion that there is a crisis of masculinity became a popular discourse. Whether or not there is agreement as to the legitimacy of this crisis (I will return to this point later on) the discourse structures many discussions of masculinity because, through the insistence that there is a crisis of masculinity, a response becomes necessary from those who disagree. Therefore, the crisis discourse is a major point of debate within scholarly and popular discussions of masculinities, and it remains a focus within the field. For David Buchbinder, cultural change can be a root of this crisis, or at least the perception of a crisis. "Although of course many members of a culture will refuse and resist changes in its structuring of gender, such transformations are inevitable. The so-called 'crisis in masculinity' of the closing decade of the twentieth century and the opening decade of the twenty-first," Buchbinder argues, "may thus be understood as a reaction to shifts occurring structurally in the culture, shifts that affect the way people understand and respond to notions of sex, sexuality, and gender" (2013, 6). This reading of masculinity in crisis at the turn of the millennium points to the complex relations that compose masculinities as well as other gendered subjectivities. These complex relations endure ongoing socio-cultural transformations, which give rise to new modes of being and restrict older ones. Masculinity is a privileged position within American culture, informed by a patriarchal hierarchy that supports and is supported by a mode of masculinity, and the power of men has remained largely unscathed throughout centuries of cultural negotiations of gendered

subjectivities and ideals. Whether held as a frontiersman, a cowboy, a soldier, a president, or a businessman, power remains firmly under the control of a male majority across socio-cultural, political, and economic institutions. A crisis then can be understood as a potential threat to the preservation of this privileged position. Todd Reeser points to various challenges to a patriarchal hierarchy as well as socio-cultural structures that set in motion transformations that affect the perception of gender. "Some say that feminism in the 1970s and 1980s precipitated a crisis in masculinity, and some believe that the visibility of male homosexuality in the last decade or so," Reeser states, "has put heterosexual masculinity into crisis because ideologies of masculinity cannot be easily defined in opposition to women or gay men" (2010, 27-28). From this perspective, movements towards equality drive this impact on masculinity. As Reeser points out, the twentieth century saw an intensification of groups seeking to redistribute power and rights who were previously marginalized by patriarchal masculinity as a mode fostered by patriarchal hierarchy.

Given that masculinity has historically held such a privileged position, raising issues and demanding the redistribution of power and rights becomes a contentious matter. Even the suggestion that some men feel threatened – or "stiffed," to use Susan Faludi's word – by socio-cultural, political, and economic transformations risks being interpreted as an attempt to justify a disproportionate form of power and rights. This occurs because the issue at the core of this so-called crisis is the loss of the outright ability to exclude others who do not fit an antiquated model of masculinity from power and rights. Furthermore, even though this power is eroding, much of the privileges and inequalities remain all too intact for any marginalized group to have equal access to power and rights. There may be an increased ability for marginalized groups to do so, but the structure itself still favors men and provides greater opportunities for them to

access positions of power in comparison to marginalized groups. While there are certainly people and groups ignorant enough to attempt to completely re-establish a patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege – such as Men's Rights groups as well as the related racist, bigoted movement pushed by Donald Trump's presidency and the Make America Great Again neo-Nazis – scholarly efforts within masculinities studies seek to analyze the feelings and reactions of men encountering transformations, which they fear displaces them from a promised privilege (Kimmel 2013), as opposed to defending the problematic views of these men or arguing for a strengthening of exclusionary socio-cultural, political, and economic structures. Buchbinder captures the feelings that men have in response to these transformations, which are understood as the root of a masculine crisis. "One way of understanding the notion of crisis," Buchbinder states, "is as a reaction of anxiety or even panic to cultural change" (2013, 6). This is often how the crisis of masculinity is characterized: men are anxious, panicked, frustrated, and angry. Much like in *Falling Down*, the result, as Buchbinder states, is that a "usually alarming and undesired emotional response on the part of individuals is then projected outward as a generalized social response that redefines change as catastrophe. The 'crisis' then ceases to be simply a reaction to perceived change. Instead, it is understood as a real threat" (ibid.). Therefore, what is threatened is not "masculinities" or masculine subjectivities – because any way of being can be redistributed and understood as a mode of masculinity; instead, it is a patriarchal hierarchy and an antiquated mode of masculinity (fostered by patriarchy) bound up in certain ideals of privilege and power.

Perceived threats or challenges to this antiquated mode of masculinity predominantly lead to violent responses. Violence is a core aspect of the crisis because it can be viewed as a demonstration of power as well as used in efforts to intimidate and eliminate the contestation brought forth by a marginalized group. After all, the history of masculinity can be understood as

waves of violence against women, minorities, and other marginalized groups. The response is war when a foreign nation is perceived as challenging you. When you find Indigenous peoples on land you want and they refuse to leave then you murder them. When you can no longer profit from slavery and Black Americans seek equal rights then you manipulate laws and structures to hurt them. When visible and religious minorities pursue refuge status in a country that is misconstrued as yours and there are horrific conditions in their countries that resulted from your military and political interferences for centuries, then you ban them and leave them to suffer atrocities. And, on a personal level, if another man questions your manhood, or a woman refuses your advances, or a gay man makes you feel uncomfortable, then you assault them. As horrible as it is to write these scenarios, they are all too real pasts, presents, and, unfortunately, futures within patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege. While some may object that not all men act this way and it is important to note that this is not the only capacity of masculinities, this is how a particular antiquated mode of masculinity functions through violent tendencies. For Kimmel, "one of the central markers of American manhood has, for many decades, been the capacity for violence" (2006, 242) – and, arguably, this is not only the marker of American manhood. Any challenge, threat, or contestation to power is conditioned by a violent response or at least the possibility and threat of violence. Thus, violence operates as a structuring dynamic that formulates this antiquated mode of masculinity as series of violent tendencies and, by extension, violent acts that maintain it and allow for it to persist. "Proving masculinity remains vitally important to young men," Kimmel states, "even as the opportunities to do so seem to be shrinking" (ibid.). This insistence on proving often materializes as an act of violence that demonstrates a man's ability to embody the ideals of this antiquated mode of masculinity. Whether it is fighting in war as a soldier, responding to a slight by initiating a fight, or verbally

chastising someone that turns down a romantic advance, I argue that proving often materializes as an act of violence.

The possibilities for enacting violence as a means of proving masculinity are vanishing. This stems from transformations of the military (fewer wars fought requiring fewer soldiers) and transformations of laws that aim to eliminate sexual harassment and other acts of violence against women as well as aggression towards minorities, both racial and sexual. Therefore, the assertion of a crisis in masculinity marks a horrid view that laments the restricting and limiting of these violent acts understood as proving manhood, and the redistribution of power in an attempt to displace male dominance. Consequently, what some men might deem to be a crisis is, in actuality, a cause for celebration. A crisis in masculinity, then, is a personal experience that could extend to a large number of men, but some of the motivations of this perceived crisis are actually positive socio-cultural achievements. "Masculinity might be in crisis," Reeser states, "when many men in a given context feel tension with larger ideologies that dominate or begin to dominate that context" (2010, 27). This intensified in the 1990s, but Reeser emphasizes that a perceived crisis in masculinity can arise in any period when many men embracing a hegemonic masculinity experience tensions in response to transformations in the structures of gender relations. Furthermore, Buchbinder works to demonstrate that "crises in masculinity are perceived from time to time, and for various reasons" (2013, 7). Therefore, the masculine crisis of the 1990s is nothing new, as historically masculinities studies can map a number of similar reactions within different periods. In fact, some scholars argue that masculinity functions through crisis. "Crisis (whether real or only perceived) and masculinity, it would appear, have gone hand in hand historically," states Buchbinder, "although the immediate causes for any sense of crisis have often differed" (ibid. 21). While masculinity is not always already in crisis, the antiquated

mode of masculinity that relies on violence for existence and validation appears to be in crisis when many men, at a personal level, perceive a simultaneous threat to their control of power and privilege as well as the limiting of opportunities to violently prove or validate the ideals of this mode of masculinity.

R. W. Connell's seminal text *Masculinities* provides important pathways for engaging with the interrelated issues of the masculine crisis discourse and male violence. Connell's work articulates the shortcomings of overtly sympathetic victimizations of men through the masculine crisis discourse, a point that links back to my discussion of Connell's work in Chapter One. Examining the scholarly literature on men and masculinity prior to 1995, when the first edition of *Masculinities* was published, Connell states, it is "a mixture of pop psychology, amateur history and ill-tempered mythmaking, and I hated it. Backward-looking, self-centred stereotypes of masculinity were the last things we needed. I didn't want to reinforce the imaginary identity of 'men' that was created by the very existence of this genre of books" (2005, xiii). Connell's take on this literature emphasizes a movement that critically engages problematic issues within masculinities studies that were previously obscured by the defense of negative positions. This assertion of masculinity as essential or normative, as discussed in Chapter One, remains an ongoing issue to confront as demonstrated by the contemporary actions of Men's Rights groups that continue to rely on the myth of an innate and unchanging core of masculinity. In terms of a masculine crisis discourse, Connell's position opens up the capacity to examine the dynamics that generate the "backward-looking, self-centred stereotypes" and, in my view, this examination necessitates theoretical work that seeks to affirm new potentialities for masculinities. Connell's work demonstrates that men struggle to embody the ideals of masculinity and this struggle leads to misaligned goals and realities. "Normative definitions," Connell states, "allow different men to

approach the standards to different degrees. But this soon produces paradoxes... Few men actually match the 'blueprint' or display the toughness and independence acted by Wayne, Bogart or Eastwood" (ibid. 70). Therefore, the flexibility of these ideals does not overcome the inconsistencies that arise from the attempted embodiment of these ideals – or, in Connell's terms, normative definitions – that is continuously deferred and denied. Anxiety, panic, frustration, and anger all cultivate through the processes of these paradoxes. These situations may be experienced in minor ways, such as a man coming to terms with the fact that he lacks the skills to help a friend build a fence, but they can also be much more significant, such as the inability to secure gainful employment and provide for a heteronormative family unit. However, no matter if the contradiction between ideal and reality is minor or significant, the potential for violence remains the likely response to prove or validate the antiquated mode of masculinity following a perceived failure, which stems from the inability to embody the characteristics of an ideal.

Connell's research also identifies violence as an integral component of this antiquated mode of masculinity that tries to maintain male privilege and patriarchal hierarchy. Patterns of violence arise from structures of social inequality, in Connell's view, especially in the maintenance of power. "First, many members of the privileged group use violence to sustain their dominance," argues Connell, and second, "violence becomes important in gender politics among men... Violence can become a way of claiming or asserting masculinity in group struggles" (ibid. 83). This use of violence as an assertion of masculinity is similar to Kimmel's observations about men needing to prove masculinity, and it supports my claim that violence and proving an antiquated mode of masculinity are intertwined. In terms of the masculine crisis discourse of the 1990s, violence is a fundamental outcome as men seek to claim or assert masculinity and to maintain or grasp a position of power they perceive as their right (Kimmel

2013). However, this reliance on violence to assert masculinity also contains an inherent weakness because it demonstrates that this antiquated mode of masculinity is vulnerable, not stable or innate, and this is confirmed through this need for protection or defense. "Violence is part of a system of domination," Connell states, "but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate" (ibid. 84). Relying on acts of violence to prove, assert, or validate masculinity marks instability and reveals that the system, informed by a patriarchal hierarchy and the male control of power, is susceptible to transformation and even eradication. When this instability becomes increasingly visible – whether through challenges posed by movements towards equity or other means, such as occurs through unemployment during periods of economic recession – violence becomes a default reaction rather than tackling the complexity of the perceived threats because this reliance on violence is built into the fabric of this antiquated mode of masculinity. If there is a promising aspect of the masculine crisis discourse, it is how it renders visible the fact that this type of masculinity is fragile. While male violence continues, we should confront it with efforts that underscore pathways for transformation and equality that map how this tendency towards violence is a misdirected expression of frustration that is produced by this mode of masculinity – in addition to condemning these antiquated ideals of masculinity outright.

In relation to the masculine crisis discourse, Connell questions whether it is appropriate to claim that the crisis of masculinity is real by proposing the alternative that masculinity cannot be in crisis because it was never stable or fixed. An important distinction arises here that separates the concept of crisis tendencies "from the colloquial sense in which people speak of a 'crisis of masculinity'" (ibid. 84). For Connell, crisis tendencies can only come about within coherent systems that are abolished or reaffirmed through a crisis. Because masculinity is not a

coherent system with a stable and fixed definition, and merely a part of the gender order, Connell suggests we might be able to speak of masculinity in terms of "disruption or transformation" but not crisis (ibid.). Therefore, masculinities cannot be in crisis because they are always undergoing some process of transformation or disruption depending on relations within the gender order at any given point in time. This view aligns with the work of Gates (2006) and Grant (2011) on gender and cinema studies – I expand on their work in the next section – as both argue that it is more generative to consider masculinities as ongoing negotiations or in fluctuation. This thinking points to disruptions and transformations through the formulation of concepts that understand the changing definitions of masculinities within the gender order. In addition, some masculinities studies scholars, such as Stephen M. Whitehead, point to the intricacies of this distinction because, even if a crisis is not factual and masculinity is not actually in crisis, this discourse is perpetuated by media and it remains an active notion within popular culture. "At the level of factual 'truth' the crisis of masculinity does not exist," argues Whitehead; "it is speculation underpinned by mythology. Nevertheless, what is factual is that such a discourse exists in the public domain" (2002, 61). Ignoring the crisis discourse, then, is not an option because it has produced so much socio-cultural visibility and men reference this mythology to justify and process their experiences as crisis. This is why masculinities studies scholars have dedicated themselves to unpacking aspects of the masculine crisis discourse even if an outright dismissal of the colloquial sense would be warranted because this notion of crisis functions to support patriarchal hierarchy – including the mode of masculinity that supports and is supported by this patriarchy – and male dominance.

Approaching and thinking through the masculine crisis discourse necessitates an examination of how it affects gender relations as well as how masculinities affect and are

affected by this discourse. Through this examination, it becomes possible not only to critique the notion of a crisis, but to also to conceptualize modes of masculinities beyond an antiquated mode of masculinity that relies on violence. "To understand the making of contemporary masculinities," Connell argues, "we need to map the crisis tendencies of the gender order" (2005, 84). While this is a monumental task in and of itself, the materialization of this crisis discourse within films offers diverse pathways for critical analysis and theoretical contemplation. In response to the crisis debate, Tom Harman argues that little theoretical formation of "what a crisis of masculinity is in itself" or "what it could be" has materialized (2011, 27). However, through Deleuze's philosophy, Harman argues "that we should neither resent nor deny the crisis of masculinity but affirm it as an incorporeal event that leads us to a deeper understanding and ethical engagement with the question of masculinity" (2011, 38). From this position, establishing the legitimacy of the crisis is not the concern and, instead, the focus becomes mapping how the masculine crisis discourse materializes and takes shape. There could be a number of approaches to this task, but my focus in this chapter is on the forms of the affects and how they relate to this discourse, and how they take shape through masculinities in American genre films from the 1990s – specifically, masculine crisis films. My concern is less whether or not masculine crisis films accurately represent the socio-cultural conditions of masculinities in the 1990s than in reading for the forms of masculinities in terms of their specificity and particularity. Therefore, rather than evaluating if the representations of these male characters can be linked to a crisis of masculinity, my formal readings illuminate the dynamic processes that take shape, as in my reading of masculinities as a form of perplexing in *The Big Lebowski* in Chapter One and masculinities as a form of frustration in *Falling Down* above. Although it is important to critique these representations, mapping the forms of masculinities that take shape within films

understood as reflecting a masculine crisis discourse can unfold a force to speculate anew given that crisis tendencies also reveal the imperfections and tensions of transformation.

This focus seeks to affirm capacities that conceptualize masculinities as creative force (McDonald 2016) and masculinities as a force of becoming. From this position, the masculine subjectivities are understood as dynamic processes that strive and persevere through transformation rather than an antiquated mode of masculinity that attempts to give the illusion of stability and constancy. Even if patriarchy is eroding and there are many challenges to male privilege and dominance (the mode of masculinity that supports and is supported by it), these systems remain largely intact and men remain in power. "The idea that we live at the moment when a traditional male sex role is softening," states Connell, "is as drastically inadequate as the idea that a true natural masculinity is now being recovered" (2005, 199). Masculinities studies circulates around this impasse when projects take as an overall goal the dismantling of violence relied on by an antiquated mode of masculinity. This attempt to eradicate the myths of an essentialist or normative masculine identity only attacks the products manufactured by this mode and not the mode itself. This leads to an oppositional split between more positive ideals of masculinity – masculinities studies projects that advocate non-violent modes – against those that support an antiquated mode of masculinity, like men's rights groups, because both movements are founded on a set of ideals that claim the other is harmful to masculine subjectivities and the socio-cultural milieu in which they are immersed. Kimmel argues that, for contemporary men, "the very adherence to traditional ideals of masculinity now leaves so many of them feeling cheated, unhappy, and unfulfilled" (2006, 218). Conversely, theories such as Bly's mythopoetic masculinity argue that men within urban environments feel unfulfilled in their experiences, which claims a similar outcome as Kimmel but from the opposite position. "The decade of the

1990s," Connell crucially notes, "is not producing a unified movement of men opposing patriarchy, any more than previous decades did" (2005, 242). Therefore, despite all the issues identified by masculinities studies in respect to the masculine crisis discourse, including Kimmel's assertion that traditional ideals of masculinity are harmful to men, there was, and I would argue that there continues to be, little progress to harness the capacities of gender order transformation to reimagine masculinities beyond modes that demand the adherence to a set of ideals. The issue stems from work within masculinities studies that remains concerned with replacing traditional ideals with new ideals, which is a theoretical move firmly rooted within the initial problem. This type of approach assumes violence to be a characteristic or an ideal of an antiquated mode of masculinity rather than coming to terms with the fact that violent acts are a response to experiences of failure that arise from the inability to embody the ideals perpetuated by a mode of masculinity. Consequently, when men fail to adhere to the new ideals offered by a more positive model of masculinity, they become susceptible to the callings of an antiquated mode of masculinity that responds to and seeks to overcome feelings of inadequacy with violence, thereby attempting to prove or validate a sense of masculinity. The need is not for new ideals of masculinity, but for a new conceptualization that comes to terms with the fact that ideals are in and of themselves unattainable because existence never remains stable enough to sustain a position at any specific point.

Connell, amongst others, has demonstrated that where an ideal or normative model of masculinity is disseminated, there are discontinuities between the promises and the outcomes because few if any men ever embody, in any sustainable way, the standards set by the codes. Furthermore, so much of the attacks launched against the notion of a masculine crisis as well as ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity construct their alternatives through the production of

oppositions. The new ideals are set up through a binaristic logic that seeks to replace characteristics perceived to be the root of the problem – for example, a lack of expressing emotions – with behaviors that incorporate the opposite – increased emotional expression. This demand requires that men stop or refrain from behaviors or practices that are associated with traditional ideals by adopting an oppositional set of new behaviors and practices. The assumption made by this demand for embracing oppositional characteristics is that male subjectivities are bound within the traditional ideals that are viewed as being harmful and problematic, leaving men feeling cheated, as Kimmel says. In essence, these alternative, new ideals begin from a premise that reinforces traditional ideals as fundamental components of masculine subjectivities, which need to be flipped or changed to an oppositional set of characteristics. Rather than offer a new set of ideals, I conceptualize masculinities as creative force, which affirms generative relations within lived realities and embraces subjectivity as an active transformation never linked to a set of stable and fixed characteristics. "Rather than the disembodiment involved in role reform," Connell argues, "this requires *re-embodiment* for men, a search for different ways of using feeling and showing male bodies" (ibid. 233). In this sense, I read Connell as outlining not a different way of being masculine that is a model or a set of traits composing a new ideal but instead an ongoing experimentation with becomings that allow masculine subjectivities to generate positive relations. More than simply looking to imitate a prior mode of masculinity that had positive outcomes for other masculine subjectivities – whether a mode based in traditional foundations associated with nature or a more contemporary mode associated with feminist theory – this requires, to quote Connell, "fresh invention" (ibid. 243). The potential for this fresh invention continuously spark at the paradoxes of promises and outcomes. In addition to advocating a detachment from patriarchal hierarchies, there looms the capacity to launch new

pathways by focusing on the experiences that unfold when men are unable to embody ideals that defer and deny embodiment. There needs to be a pathway for embracing the dynamic processes of ongoing transformation, which would stave off a reliance on violence as a means of recapturing the illusion of stability. "Men continue to be detached from the defence of patriarchy by the contradictions and intersections of gender relations," Connell states, and, because of this detachment, "new possibilities open for reconfiguration and transformation of masculinities" (ibid.). While violent responses always loom over these events, there are other forces waiting to materialize if restrictions and limitations on becomings are broken down. Rather than composing new ideals, the insistence becomes one of affirming creative force and embracing masculinities that is not yet, which emphasizes seeking positive relations that generate the perseverance of life in all forms.

The Masculine Crisis Discourse and Film Genre

Popular cinema is often understood as reflecting and processing socio-cultural and political issues, and, in this manner, American genre films from the 1990s can be examined through the masculine crisis discourse. Beyond popular cinema, Buchbinder views this as a concern of media in general as he argues that "popular media persistently return to the issue of a contemporary crisis in masculinity, in different guises" (2013, 7). Evidently, there is a relationship between popular cinema and the masculine crisis discourse, which is visible across a number of film genres and individual films in the 1990s. These films represent men as anxious and angry due to their assumptions about threats to their manhood, and they use physical, psychological, and verbal violence in an attempt to assert and prove their masculinity. Tim Edwards argues that all of the "issues in relation to a perceived crisis of masculinity have gained

added credence due to their increased prevalence in a variety of forms of media coverage" (2006, 15). In terms of popular cinema, this acknowledges the role that images perform in the perpetuation of ideas and beliefs. "On one level at least, the crisis of masculinity is a crisis of representation. There are in essence two sides to this question," argues Edwards, "first, the extent to which the crisis of masculinity exists simply as a matter of its representation as such; and secondly, the extent to which contemporary representations of masculinity fuel the sense that masculinity is itself in crisis" (ibid.). Edwards identifies the significant possibility that media, such as popular cinema, disseminate the idea that masculinity is in crisis by producing a number of films – as well as other media forms – that show men experiencing crises. Therefore, in Edwards' view, a crisis of representation indicates that either representations of the masculine crisis discourse materialize because they are a direct reflection of socio-cultural realities – masculinity is in crisis – or these representations took a tension or a set of concerns and produced the discourse that through media becomes thought of as a socio-cultural reality – it invents or creates the crisis. Edwards views the masculine crisis discourse as primarily fueled by representation, and he claims, "there is very little to endorse an overall masculinity in crisis thesis" (ibid. 24). In his view, "there is no crisis of masculinity as it is commonly portrayed" (ibid.), that it is instead a media construct. The crisis, according to Edwards' analysis, is a discourse that is portrayed, represented, and disseminated through media, including popular cinema.

There are a number of potential pathways to examine the motivations as well as the outcomes of Edwards' claim. In terms of popular cinema, it is possible to look at the impact of this masculine crisis discourse on film genre and conceptualize a group of films as a cycle. Philippa Gates notes that "the release of a number of films at the turn of the new millennium

centered on male protagonists in crisis...[this cycle] seemed to indicate a broader social concern that at the turn of the new millennium masculinity was, indeed, in crisis" (2006, 46). Gates points to films such as *American Beauty*, *Fight Club*, *Magnolia* (Anderson 1999), and *American Psycho* (Harron 2000), among others, as having a male protagonist in crisis. That being said, Gates, agreeing with Edwards, does not believe that the appearance of these films validates the socio-cultural claim of a crisis in masculinity. Gates argues, "the release of 'masculine crisis' films in 1999 and 2000, while perhaps indicative of popular opinion regarding the subject of contemporary masculine crisis, is not necessarily proof that masculinity in society at large is in crisis" (ibid. 47-48). This is not a dismissal of the masculine crisis discourse. Even though Gates is skeptical that a crisis in masculinity is an actual socio-cultural reality, she argues, "the presence of such a great number of films focusing on masculinity in crisis that proved popular at the turn of the millennium suggests that it is a topic of concern and audiences want to see films that explore contemporary definitions and conceptions of gender" (ibid. 49). Therefore, it is evident that "masculine crisis" films were popular in the 1990s in a similar way to Western films – both types of films responded to desires and provided fantasies that satisfied a socio-cultural interest in transformations of gender.

However, there is a major difference between a masculine crisis film and a Western film. Open any book on film genre and there will be a discussion of the Western film genre. Conversely, there is little film genre work that takes up the category of the masculine crisis film. There are many reasons for this fact, perhaps the most prominent being the lack of any industry mention of a masculine crisis film. American popular cinema produces many genres, including Western films, but no film has been promoted as a masculine crisis film. This fact alone is not detrimental to the existence of a masculine crisis film genre because there are many different

ways to conceptualize film genres, including critical and audience responses as discussed in chapter one. Hollywood did not set out to make and advertise film noir in the 1940s, but a number of postwar European critics, seeing a trend across a number of films, identified the existence of a new type of film in the 1950s (Luhr 2012). The status of film noir as a genre is notoriously contentious and it can be debated as a period, a style, and a tendency rather than a film genre (Naremore 2008). Nevertheless, studies of film noir as a genre are abundant and thought-provoking because of the potential to explore the narrative and stylistic links between this set of films at the level of content and form, the lively debate that is sparked through attempts to discern the historical range of the films, and the influence this vibrant cinematic moment has on film history and theory. While it is possible to argue that certain definitions of film genre do not permit the consideration of film noir as a genre – for example, in comparison to the Western film or the science fiction film – it is undeniable that considering film noir as a genre has made vital contributions to cinema studies. Film noir, as a corpus, can be considered as a set of films from *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston 1941) to *Touch of Evil* (Welles 1958), but this has been challenged and it is possible to think of film noir as including neo-noir films from New Hollywood as well as a range of other films with related stylistic tendencies from international cinema to contemporary Hollywood. In short, no matter the body of films taken to constitute film noir, explorations of film noir as a genre, or a set of related films.

Film noir is a distinct circumstance within the history of film genre because it is the only corpus of films treated so robustly as a genre while simultaneously having its status as a genre critiqued. Conversely, cinema studies, and genre film studies more specifically, for the most part does not hesitate to include the Western film, the war film, the musical, the melodrama, the crime film, the science fiction film, and others as generic categories. However, instinctive

inclusion within this discourse of generic categorization does not promise a clear demarcation of any genre, as discussed in Chapter One. Even if we rely solely on the marketing of the film industry, as Neale, Altman, and others demonstrate is a viable approach, new genres can always emerge, films are often conceived as generic hybrids to capture wide audiences, and the popularity of a film or a cycle within a genre can lead to a spinoff from that existing genre. Furthermore, we may question the generic category of many films depending on the lens through which we read the film, even when the film appears, through a particular lens, to be exclusive to a single genre. For example, is *Stagecoach* (Ford 1939) a Western film or a version of the ensemble drama *Grand Hotel* (Goulding 1932)? After all, when *Stagecoach* was released it was reviewed as "a *Grand Hotel* on wheels" (Beaton in Grant, 2003, 179). Despite this review, the answer still appears to be rather easy: of course, the film is a Western. However, Thomas Schatz's research reveals how the production of the film was influenced by the "omnibus films" of the 1930s "in which a colorful collection of characters from different social strata are thrown together in dangerous or exotic circumstances" (McBride and Wilmington quoted in Schatz, 2003, 27). Nonetheless, *Stagecoach* is, without a doubt, a Western film – Schatz also demonstrates how the film uses conventions of prior Western films – but this would not hinder or prevent potentially generative thoughts and concepts from arising in a consideration of omnibus films from the 1930s, and including *Stagecoach* within this analysis.

Stagecoach is far from an isolated example. In a similar way, we could also ask if *Rio Bravo* (Hawks 1959) is a Western film or a romantic comedy. Again, the film appears to be a Western, but, as Deleyto demonstrates, the film can be categorized as a combination of the Western and the romantic comedy. "For the analysis of a film like *Rio Bravo* it is therefore useful to concentrate on how the combination of romantic comedy and the western or, to be more

accurate, the presence of romantic comedy in the midst of a western scenario," argues Deleyto, "affects our understanding and our critical interpretation of the film, and, perhaps more ambitiously, to explore how the specific way in which Hawks mixes the two genres contributes to the cinematic history of both" (2012, 233). Deleyto reveals that Hawks, a master of the romantic comedy, brings many conventions from this genre into a Western film scenario that can be explored as influencing the body of the Western film genre or the romantic comedy genre. Given the iconography of *Rio Bravo*, the film is predominantly considered a Western, but new insights are generated by the connections the film makes with other genres. Furthermore, in terms of iconography, many scholars consider *No Country for Old Men* (Coen and Coen 2007) a Western film (Bandy and Stoeck 2012, Nelson 2013, and Carter 2014), but the contemporary setting along the United States-Mexico border amidst the fallout from a botched drug deal is certainly far outside the timeframe of the classic Western. Nonetheless, the southwestern American desert landscapes, the aging sheriff Ed Tom Bell (Tommy Lee Jones), the murderous villain Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem), and the struggle throughout the narrative to restore stability to civilization are elements consistent with many Western films. Now, if the desire of a particular characterization of the Western genre is to only include films that fall within strict boundaries of the frontier period – as problematic as any such strict definition will eventually be – then one probably dismisses *No Country for Old Men*, but keeps within the category *Stagecoach* and *Rio Bravo*. There may also be good reason to exclude *No Country for Old Men* – and similar films, such as *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (Jones 2005), *There Will Be Blood* (Anderson 2007), and *The Counsellor* (Scott 2013) – from a grouping of contemporary Westerns, especially if the goal is to look at how the American frontier in the late 1800s is being revisited by new filmmakers. All that said, there could also be a number of reasons to include *No*

Country for Old Men, and other films that are set in periods outside of the late 1800s, within a study of the Western film genre's history to examine how classical iconography gets reimagined in a contemporary moment, how the figure of the aging sheriff is represented differently to reflect socio-cultural interests, or how the concerns of the Western film genre have been affected by contemporary cinematic trends. For every good reason or transcendent definition that excludes *No Country for Old Men* from the category of the Western film, there is likely an equally intriguing reason to include it. In short, there are probably some films that should not be considered within certain generic categories – for example, one might struggle to think of a good reason to claim *Grand Hotel* is a Western film – but this does not prevent the speculative capacity that could analyze the relations and potentialities that unfold when a film is examined in comparison to a genre to which it initially appears to not belong. Furthermore, as Janet Staiger (2012) has argued, the more we examine film genres and genre films, the more apparent it becomes that no genre is pure, belonging to one genre only.

Therefore, despite the appearance that there are clear differences between the Western film and a masculine crisis film in terms of their generic legitimacy, it is possible to consider a cycle of Western films as well as a cycle of masculine crisis films as exploring issues surrounding transformations of gender relations in a given moment and masculinities in particular. This is neither to say that the masculine crisis film is a new genre nor to argue that I have discovered a film genre that has been overlooked. However, it is generative to think through and read for the forms and relations of the masculine crisis films, as identified by Gates, as perhaps a cycle of the social problem film that explores, processes, and even contributes to the creation of the masculine crisis discourse. In the previous chapter, I explored the Western film cycle of the early 1990s through mythopoetic masculinity, Kimmel's notion of the self-made

man, and the nature-culture binary. In this chapter, I explore films influenced by the popular discourse surrounding a crisis of masculinity in the 1990s that takes shape in relation to similar tensions and ideals of masculinities. This exploration embraces Gates' assertion that masculinity is "in a state of fluctuation in its attempt to negotiate social and economic changes that define gendered social roles" (2006, 49), as well as Grant's claim that masculinities are in a ceaseless state of ongoing negotiation (2011, 6). It is important to highlight the distinction between films representing a masculine crisis discourse and an *actual* crisis in masculinity because, as Grant points out, "quick to look for cracks in a previously assumed monolithic but mythic representation, many critics identified moments of 'crisis' in the representation of masculinity in movies" (ibid.). By examining a range of American genre films from D. W. Griffith's 1919 *Broken Blossoms* to the contemporary films of Kathryn Bigelow, Grant demonstrates how representations of masculinity are consistently reflected as undergoing periods of instability. This demonstrates that genre film as well as the history of American cinema regularly represents masculinity in crisis.

Gates, in a focus on the detective film, also demonstrates how the various crises of masculinity within periods of popular cinema do not necessarily align within the socio-cultural milieu of the corresponding period. Instead, Gates argues that these films "offer a space in which conflicting conceptions of gender roles can be expressed, negotiated, and, in many cases, resolved in the attempt to offer viewers a fictional solution to their contradictory experiences of power in society" (2006, 50). Therefore, masculine crisis films are picking up on the tensions and transformations of a socio-cultural moment and thinking through them. This process is not a representation or a reflection of gender relations, but the power of cinema's engagement with the intensities arising from conflicts, contradictions, paradoxes, tensions, and ambiguities within

these altering relations. Specifically, in terms of masculinities, popular cinema generates alternatives to and alterations of the lived realities of masculine subjectivities. While this does not preclude an analysis that outlines how these alternatives and alterations are reflections of socio-cultural significance, the capacities of these fictional solutions far exceed the actualities of socio-cultural experiences themselves. Their expressions, negotiations, and resolutions offer fictional solutions that surpass the limits, restrictions, and current boundaries of the socio-cultural gender relations that they map. Although the solutions themselves often reinscribe codes of prevailing power structures, such as the many heteronormative unions that conclude the Western films discussed in the last chapter, the forms of masculinities hold potential with affective forces to be read anew precisely because so many of these images embrace virtual potentialities. In other words, in order to produce fictional solutions, these images must first explore pathways that redistribute the positions that compose conflicts, contradictions, paradoxes, tensions, and ambiguities as a means of producing imagined reconciliations. Furthermore, the film's dynamic processes are not necessarily tied to socio-cultural influences. "Although film as a cultural product is inevitably affected by social and cultural changes," Gates argues, "those changes do not necessarily have a direct expression in film because of film's own conventions that override external influences" (ibid. 48). By pursuing close readings for the forms of masculinities opened up by groupings of films, there is a potential to generate new tools and concepts that rethink masculinities. This speculative potential arises from the force of reading because the images are themselves exploring virtual potentialities rather than reflecting directly our experiences of masculinities. To come back to the masculine crisis discourse, this is how films can represent something informed by contemporary concerns – for example, a crisis in masculinity – that do not have any validity in reality.

The Masculine Crisis Film

Bearing in mind the protean capacities of film genre categorization, the cycle of masculine crisis films that appear in the 1990s become an emergent body to interrogate. Although these films could be put into divergent generic categories, *Falling Down*, *The Big Lebowski*, *American Beauty*, and *Fight Club* can all be connected through narratives that explore masculine crises. Originally, this idea of a masculine crisis film arose in Gates' work on masculinity and the detective film. She refers specifically to *Fight Club*, *American Beauty*, *American Psycho*, and *The Beach* (Boyle 2000). "These films present men who – rather than rising triumphant over their crisis—are defeated and," Gates argues, "in being so, debunk the myth of dominant masculinity that has informed society since the frontier era and expose men's lack of access to power in American society" (ibid. 47). Following Gates, there appears to be a specific mythic discourse produced by these films that situate the masculine crisis film in relation to the Western film. If the Western film is bound to affirming the myths of the self-made man, then the masculine crisis film manufactures a counter-myth that represents masculinity in terms of the male as victim. As discussed, this victimization claim is easily discredited by masculinities studies as is the essentialism of Kimmel's notion of the self-made man. However, it is intriguing that popular cinema explores modes of masculinity as fictional solutions to tensions and transformations in gender relations. If the Western film offers a fantasy that resolves male anxiety by returning to the wilderness in search of traditional masculinity, the masculine crisis film offers a fantasy that attempts to resolve male anxiety through violence and fabricates a view of men as victimized. "The 'masculine crisis' film," as outlined by Gates, "offered audiences protagonists who perform crisis – through a regression to adolescence – as a backlash against the perceived loss of masculine power incited by female empowerment and the perceived feminizing

effect of consumerist culture" (ibid.). Therefore, the masculine crisis film cycle generates the potential for reading the forms of masculinities that affect and are affected by a transforming society where the possibilities for embodying the ideals of the frontier and an antiquated mode of masculinity have become increasingly sparse and violence becomes the only way to cling to these ideals in an attempt to halt or deny change.

Beyond the four films Gates identifies as foundational, there is the potential to expand the definition of the masculine crisis film cycle to include more films. My expanded definition considers the cycle to consist of films from the 1990s that present a contemporary man who undergoes a crisis when the stability of his life and identity is disrupted by an unexpected force, which may leave him defeated, debunking the myth of dominant masculinity, or see them overcome this crisis and restore stability, reinforcing the myth of dominant masculinity. This expanded definition adds, among others, the following films to Gates' list: *The Big Lebowski* and those I analyze in this chapter: *Leaving Las Vegas* (Figgis 1995), *Jerry Maguire* (Crowe 1996), *Schizopolis* (Soderbergh 1996), *L.A. Confidential* (Hanson 1997), *Good Will Hunting* (Van Sant 1997), *Lost Highway* (Lynch 1997), *Boogie Nights* (Anderson 1997), *Rounders* (Dahl 1998), *Eyes Wide Shut* (Kubrick 1999), *Magnolia* (Anderson 1999), *Office Space* (Judge 1999), *American Psycho* (Herron), and *The Beach* (Boyle 2000). There is a precedent set for this type of generic cycle definition. Grant explores the connections between films "that reveal affinities to other genres" (2011, 155) in his definition of the yuppie horror film. Also, David Greven outlines a new genre in which "the central conflict is a complex negotiation for power between *two* male protagonists, each played by a film star, both of whom lay legitimate claim to narrative dominance" (2009, 125). He refers to this genre as the double-protagonist film. This exploration of generic cycles exemplifies Ledger Grindon's view that "the mapping of a genre's cycles and

clusters is itself an act of interpretation and evaluation and, as such, is open to ongoing debate" (2012, 58). Therefore, I do acknowledge my mapping of the masculine crisis film is open for debate, yet I also view it as an interpretive act with the capacity to unfold new thinking in relation to masculinities and cinematic form.

Embracing the speculative potential of film genre theory, it is generative to group these masculine crisis films as a generic cycle. Specifically, I argue that the masculine crisis film may be understood as a cycle of the social problem films – one that responds specifically to the transformation of gender relations. This definition works within the film cycle theory of Amanda Ann Klein, a cinema studies scholar. "Occasionally, the similarities between early films in a cycle," Klein states, "are the result of some sociocultural cue—a new artistic trend, a social problem, a political movement, or a defining world event—that several filmmakers decide to address independently of one another" (2011, 12). As an emerging social problem – addressing a tension stemming from changing gender relations – the masculine crisis film addresses this issue, but I do not see *Falling Down* as a film that motivated the production of the other films due to its popularity. This would be the case, for example, with *Boyz in the Hood* (Singleton 1991) and *New Jack City* (Van Peebles 1991) as their popularity and financial success sparked, what has been called, the ghetto action cycle of the early 1990s (ibid. 139), which also emerges because of the success of *Do the Right Thing* (Lee 1989). Conversely, in terms of the masculine crisis film, there appears to be a strong audience interest in films that explore the issues facing masculinities within contemporary society, as outlined by Gates above, without any particular film sparking the cycle. This also fits with Klein's theory because "film cycles are created to fit the contours of audience desires in precise ways" (ibid. 13). Given the socio-cultural tensions, masculine crisis films responded to the desire of audiences to engage with fictional solutions to the problem

which crystalize through the notion of men as victims. In addition to other media, popular cinema functioned to produce a crisis discourse, as outlined by Edwards, that became the solution in and of itself. Whether or not the individual man was able to overcome his crisis, the mode of masculinity that relies on patriarchal hierarchy and male control of power had an additional outlet to deflect ongoing attacks against its legitimacy.

Anxious and angry men let down by the ideals of an antiquated masculinity now had two options: seek retreat in the wilderness in an attempt to reconnect with essential manliness (the basic tenet of the Western film as discussed in the previous chapter) or blame feminism, women, immigrants, minorities, liberals, commercialism, and globalization for making men victims and respond with violence (the basic tenet of the masculine crisis film). Klein proposes that we "view film cycles as a mold placed over the zeitgeist, which, when pulled away, reveals the contours, fissures, and complicated patterns of the contemporary moment" (ibid. 20). This view aligns with Gates' claim that these masculine crisis films were offering fictional solutions to socio-cultural problems as well as Edwards' claim that the crisis is not a reality and instead simply a discourse manufactured largely by the media. Klein is very interested in the socio-cultural and historical motivations behind the emergence of film cycles. "These kinds of films are significant not so much because of what they are," Klein argues, "but because of why they were made, why studios believed that they were a smart investment, why audiences went to see them, and why they eventually stopped being produced" (ibid.). I would challenge Klein here, because these films are also important for what they are precisely through the ways they address a social problem and explore new potentialities, even if they re-inscribe them within tired belief systems. While I agree that these films can tell us something about socio-cultural conditions in the moment of

their production, these films can also be read to harness potentialities to generate new ideas specifically because of the explorations they undertake.

Not only are the sites of production and reception important, the forms of these films have the capacity to be read to think anew. This approach connects Brinkema's radical formalism to Stella Bruzzi's work on masculinities and *mise-en-scène*. "Masculine anxiety or anxiety about masculinity as issues when they exist," Bruzzi argues, "are commonly expressed via non-narrative means" (2013, 38). Even though the masculine crisis film is not a film genre with an extensive history, there are correlations that connect this cycle with other vibrant cinematic periods that explore transformations of gender relations. In particular, film noirs and male melodramas from the 1940s and 1950s were responding to changing perceptions of masculinity in a postwar period. For Grindon, "changes in social conditions can generate shifting treatments of dramatic conflicts that may initiate a new genre cycle or cluster" (2012, 47). While this point has been made previously, treatment becomes an important focus because it points us towards the non-narrative means highlighted by Bruzzi's claim. Furthermore, thinking specifically about film noir and male melodramas, these two film cycles are highly stylized. As James Naremore states, film noir as a period foregrounds cinematic style (2008, 2). Examining the core socio-cultural issues at stake in these films from the 1940s and 1950s – mainly shifts in the roles and power of men in a postwar society – it is evident that the forms of the films are just as important as the motivation for making them. This brings me to the quote from Bordwell that opens the chapter, which I use as an epigraph. On the one hand, Bordwell is correct in his implicit critique of film studies scholars for the tendency to read films as representing masculinity in crisis – a critique Grant also makes. On the other hand, Bordwell's critique overlooks a close reading of cinematic form as having the capacity to unfold speculative thinking when films are not simply

read as representing a crisis in masculinity because, as Gates and Grant both demonstrate, that is a misconception. Rather than associating representations of masculinity within the film to a socio-cultural significance, there is a potential to read the vibrant explorations of transforming gender relations to generate a force to open up the unthought and the not yet of masculinities. Merely interpreting the crisis experienced by a male character in a film as a representation of a masculine crisis in society demonstrates socio-cultural significance, but it does not create new concepts and tools for rethinking masculinities. However, closely reading for the forms of masculinities as processing transformations of gender relations can unfold a force with this speculative and creative potentiality.

Examining the scholarly work on film noir and male melodramas from the 1940s and 1950s, parallels are evident between the representations and issues of the masculine crisis film of the 1990s. For example, Barbara Klinger, in a discussion of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Johnson 1956), states, "the coercive conformity perceived to be at the heart of postwar corporate enterprise raised fears about the loss of rugged individualism and manhood" (1994, 113). Klinger's analysis highlights how male melodrama involves an examination of a man losing rugged manhood, which resonates with the discourse of Bly and mythopoetic masculinity. Similarly, Thomas Schatz, in a discussion of *Bigger Than Life* (Ray 1956), argues, "Ed abuses the drug because it gives him a sense of power, mission, and self-esteem that his familial and social roles do not" (1991, 163). The core issues that Schatz observes revolves around changing gender relations that strip men of complete control and power. While Tom (Gregory Peck) in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* does not resort to the same violent acts as Ed (James Mason) in *Bigger Than Life*, both films end with hollow conclusions that can be read as forced and artificial. These conclusions reaffirm patriarchal hierarchy (including the mode of masculinity

that supports and is supported by it) and the heteronormative familial unit because the wives of these men are simply expected to overlook all of the problematic actions of their husbands and move forward as if the future will be different. The response to changing gender relations resulting in a loss of male power and control is to produce a discourse that denotes males as victims, which allows them to regain power and control because when they lose it then life falls into chaos. Laura Mulvey identifies this discourse within male melodramas, specifically the work of Douglas Sirk. "He turns the conventions of melodrama sharply in the direction of tragedy," in *Written on the Wind* (1956) and *The Tarnished Angels* (1957) argues Mulvey, "as he shows his pre-Oedipal adult protagonists Roger Shumann and Kyle Hadley (both played by Robert Stack) tortured and torn by the accoutrements of masculinity, phallic obsessions which caricature actual emotional dependence and fear of impotence, finally bringing death" (1987, 76). Mulvey is suspicious of this death because it "does not produce a new, positive reconciliation but provides an extremely rare epitaph, an insight on man as victim in patriarchal society" (ibid. 77). These two outcomes of the male melodrama – the artificial happy endings of films like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and *Bigger Than Life* as opposed to the death and projection of the male as victim in a patriarchal society in films like *Written on the Wind* and *The Tarnished Angels* – shape the masculine crisis film. While the artificial happy endings restore male power and control through an acceptance that an imbalance within this structure of power and control throws life into chaos, the deadly endings of other films point to even graver possibilities where women live on with the scars of the experience and they are left miserable or hopeless while also allowing other men to emerge – Mitch in *Written on the Wind* and Burke in *The Tarnished Angels* – with new positions of power and control.

The violence of film noir during the 1940s and 1950s permeates the socio-cultural milieu of postwar America, which was undergoing gender relation transformations with men returning from war seeking to reassert their place and to display stability amidst a mass entry of women into the workforce and questions surrounding the mental health of soldiers. "The 'tough' thriller," as Frank Krutnik states, "seems to be driven by challenges to the mutually reinforcing regimes of masculine cultural authority and masculine psychic stability" (1991, xiii). Whether a private detective, a police officer, or maybe just a guy in the wrong place at the wrong time, the man in the tough thriller – as well as film noir in the 1940s and 1950s more broadly – was vulnerable against higher authorities, susceptible to the influence of devious women, and usually struggling to keep up within a socio-cultural milieu offering them every chance to fail. Krutnik notes that one of the first examples in this cycle of films, *The Maltese Falcon*, is abnormal because it "is characterised by the relatively unproblematic validation of the detective as masculine hero" (ibid. 93). In this film, Samuel Spade is strong and in control, but the other films in this cycle "tend to be obsessed with lapses from, and failures to achieve, such a position of unified and potent masculinity" (ibid.). This is also a common thread in the masculine crisis films where lapses in dominance and failure to grasp desires are abundant. While the assumed stimulus for these failures tends to be framed as women – hence the famous femme fatale of film noir – or minorities and any one in between, it becomes apparent that this is a result of clinging to an antiquated mode of masculinity. "American manhood – always more about the fear of falling than the excitement of rising, always more about the agony of defeat, as it were, than the thrill of victory – suddenly," in the 1990s Kimmel states, "felt desperate, clinging to whatever it could find, just trying to hold on" (2006, 218). Here is where we find the forms of masculinities in the masculine crisis film, in the throes of misconceived failure and misdirected blame.

Displacement: Fight Club (Fincher 1999)

David Fincher's *Fight Club* is often viewed as a quintessential masculine crisis film of the 1990s because the film represents men pursuing violence as a means of overcoming their feelings of inadequacy and failure. Rehling views *Fight Club* as positing women, "particularly suffocating mothers," as the problem producing a masculine crisis (2009, 77). For Rehling, this film echoes the work of men's rights groups – such as Bly's and his notion of mythopoetic masculinity – as the narrator of the film (Edward Norton's character referred to as Jack from here forward) with the help of an imaginary alter ego Tyler Durden establishes a fight club for men to practice violent rituals they see as suppressed within a contemporary society. *Fight Club* "screens the same lament for the loss of paternal authority, the same fantasy of restoring a lost primal masculinity, and the same implicit blaming of women for the current 'crisis in masculinity' and perceived feminization of society," argues Rehling, "that characterized Bly's men's movement and popular media rhetoric of the '90s. Violence is therefore valorized because it is posited as one of the few characteristics to which men can still lay exclusive claim" (ibid.). However, it is important to note that, where Bly's movement pushed men to the wilderness, Tyler's and Jack's fight club drives men into seedy alleys and dank basements. Furthermore, as much as Bly talks about warrior brains, Tyler and Jack advocate a far more extreme violence that is disconnected from the self-making associated with the frontier where manhood is also demonstrated by a mastery of nature. The only other things that Tyler and Jack appear to master, besides beating people's faces, are soap making, bomb building, cult creation, and mayhem. "Today, the capacity for violence is a marker of authentic masculinity (as in *Fight Club*)," states Kimmel, "a test of manhood" (2006, 242). The perception of many of the men within the film is that something is missing from their life and they lack the opportunity to display an authentic

masculinity, which they counter by joining a fight club as opposed to seeking a retreat in the wilderness. In this sense, masculinities are a form of displacement that take shape through the many ways things – from manhood to identity – become moved, shifted, transferred, and occupied amidst a consistent dissonance.

Form as displacement illuminates the processes through which masculinities take shape within the film in relation to a masculine crisis discourse, which projects the fears of men concerning a position of control and power in a socio-cultural milieu that is moving towards equality. The men within the film sense something is missing, or under siege, within themselves as they perform day jobs in offices and service work against pressures to conform to consumerist produced standards of masculine bodies – of note, something women experience consistently under the violent oppression of patriarchy. This unfolds through processes of displacement, which leave them with feeling misunderstood as being removed or even occupied by unnatural forces. "Tyler blames consumerism, television, and the lies of culture for male dissatisfaction," Gates observes, "but he also notes that masculine identity is not natural, something that one is born with, but rather something that is born out of masculinity's relationship to culture" (2006, 46), which echoes Beauvoir's famous claim that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (2011, 283). Gates' observation is important because it identifies how masculinities are malleable and the men within the film feel this too, but ideals of an antiquated masculinity – specifically, the mode associated with patriarchal hierarchy and male power – distort the potential for becomings in order to push men back towards normative and essentialist definitions of masculine subjectivity. "The film suggests that masculinity can only be defined," Gates argues, "through work, war, and economic strife: without conflict to test masculine violence and power, masculinity cannot be proven. *Fight Club* is a substitution for cultural conflict through which

men can reassert their masculinity against the feminization of consumerism" (ibid.). Rather than realizing that the ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity are producing the emptiness they perceive, the men in the film look to blame others – much like Foster in *Falling Down* – and they see violence as the only means to overcome this displacement. Masculinities as a form of displacement connects with the removal of men from their assumed rightful position in a socio-cultural milieu saturated in transformations – especially, in terms of gender relations – as well as the processes through which they use violence in an attempt to move anything blocking them from reassuming this position.

Proving masculinity in *Fight Club*, as discussed through Kimmel's work earlier in this chapter, becomes a central concern of characters that experience their lives as a displacement of the ideals of an antiquated masculinity. Violence is less of a solution to the processes of displacement and more the means to be used to re-acquire positions of power and control, which functions as a process of displacement itself. In this sense, the violence itself does not offer the power and control rather it is the resulting displacement of other bodies – material and immaterial – through violence that causes the position men within the film covet to be vacated by others. "It seeks to repair the damaged psyche of young American men of the present," argues Greven, "by enacting a return to primitive and purgative codes of male violence" (2009, 160). Like *Falling Down*, Greven highlights that *Fight Club* also advocates a return to an archaic, bygone mode of masculinity, which, by extension, attempts to obscure processes of becoming in the desire to remain unchanged as a stable and fixed masculine subject of patriarchal hierarchy. However, Greven's reading of the film does not push through a binaristic logic and instead seeks out a series of representations in the film in order to align the film within an oppositional logic. He argues, "Tyler is Shakespeare's 'ill angel' or Conrad's secret sharer to Norton's nonentity

Narrator" (ibid. 162) and, through a series of binaries, Greven (2009) reduces *Fight Club* – and other films with double protagonists in the 1990s and 2000s – to the same general tendency: a split between narcissism and masochism. This explains away the particularity and specificity of the masculinities that take shape in the film in order to understand violence as associated with underlying socio-cultural significance. Masculinity, in Greven's interpretation, is comprehended through preexisting notions of manhood, which denies the potential unique forces that could arise from closely reading how the masculinities within the film take shape.

Throughout both cinema studies and masculinities studies work focused on masculinities in the 1990s, *Fight Club* is a prominent principal film for discussion. However, like Greven, these discussions approach the film as a static and fixed text that reflects socio-cultural issues surrounding transforming gender relations rather than reading the cinematic form of the film as a vibrant intensity with the capacity to offer new insights into the production of these issues. "*Fight Club* may be said to express a fantasy of return to nineteenth-century American manhood, a return dependent upon a deeply ill-informed misreading of those historical codes," states Greven, "a fantasy frontier in which men were properly homosocialized, rigorously *en-* rather than *e-*masculated, and women's apparently rampant lust for sex and power were sorely, severely checked" (ibid. 167). A crisis of masculinity, in Greven's interpretation, develops through a misconception of a historical manhood – from nineteenth-century America – but this assumes the masculinities within the film represent unwavering points against transformations. Masculinity is discussed as a drive for a past rather than as a dynamic process that takes shape through relations to the ideals of an antiquated masculinity as well as a multiplicity of relations that are constantly transforming not only the milieu of any given masculinity but also any sense of masculinity itself. Therefore, *Fight Club* can only be a fantasy of return through the understanding of

existence as linear and progression, which would allow for the possibility of a regression – the fantasy of return that Greven discusses.

However, by conceptualizing existence as continuous becomings, an antiquated mode of masculinity is no more a historical past than it is merely an impossibility because every set of ideals will continuously defer and deny embodiment. By interpreting *Fight Club* through a binaristic logic, Greven develops a view of masculinity that opposes regression, but also projects the possibility of progression. Greven argues, "the film demonstrates that its pugilistic, lawless, murderously violent fraternal subculture has had a purpose all along: preparing its protagonist for normative sexuality and freeing him from the effeminating taint of corporate culture" (ibid. 174). While he is critical of this outcome and calls for the embracing of alternative masculinities, Greven structures masculinity through an oppositional logic divided according to masculinity as progression or regression through the split representation of narcissist and masochist masculine subjectivities. This type of interpretation restricts and limits the creative force of masculinities by obscuring the processes of becoming through which existence takes shape, which perpetuates the myth of masculine regression – the possibility of re-acquiring a mode of antiquated masculinity – precisely because it asserts the possibility of progression. In effect, if masculinities are understood as something that can progress and become good then they must also be subjectivities that can revert to regressive states, such as primitive and purgative codes of violence. Rather than sorting masculinities according to a binaristic logic, reading masculinities as a form of displacement in *Fight Club* seizes the chaotic and uncontrollable unfolding of existence, which leaves no pathways for regression or progression. Instead, interrogating masculinities as taking shape through processes of displacement illuminates the instability that composes any given subjectivity, which necessitates an affirming of positive relations – in all forms – that contribute

to perseverance rather than imagining a transcendent set of ideals – whether positive or negative – and assuming one can progress or regress towards them.

Closely reading masculinities as a form of displacement generates speculation that unfolds a force that ruptures the masculine crisis discourse. From the beginning of the film, the narrative advances through displacements. This is illuminated by the appearance of Tyler Durden's body spliced into frames of the film in several scenes before he enters the narrative as Jack's hallucination of an alter ego (*figure 4.1 and 4.2*). In effect, Tyler physically displaces the space of Jack's milieu before he embodies a displacement of his feelings of failure and inadequacy, which are then redirected through acts of violence as a means of displacing these feelings. The logic of the film undertakes displacements as spaces continuously fill with things, substances, thoughts, and bodies that are foreign or deceitful, which creates ongoing tensions leading to feelings of inadequacy and violence. Whether it is the IKEA furniture that digitally fills Jack's living space or the gas that floods his digital condo from a leaking stove before blasting all of his belongings onto the street below, the film takes shape through displacements. In terms of Jack's condo, these displacements configure his masculinity in relation to his frustration and his inability to seize ideals of consumerist masculinity – and then eventually the antiquated masculinity that Tyler offers as an alternative. Wondering what dining set defines him as a person, Jack continuously pursues the acquisition of the perfect condo furniture and decoration alignment as more and more things he cannot stop gathering displace the space within his apartment. He even mentions several times that his wardrobe or furniture was almost complete, or at least respectable. In part, this is what Tyler pushes Jack to rebel against: the pressures of consumerism. However, the ideals of consumerism are not unrelated to those of the antiquated mode of masculinity Tyler promotes. Consumerism might push people to

continuously purchase items in hopes of achieving the perfect condo or the perfect wardrobe that never materializes, but the antiquated mode of masculinity that supports patriarchal hierarchy and male power also defers and denies embodiment because it is also an illusion amidst the ever-transforming conditions of existence as such. Tyler's solution may be destruction as opposed to the construction of material possessions, but that destruction itself is carefully tailored by rules with no endpoint unless that is death.



figure 4.1 – Fight Club (Fincher 1999)



figure 4.2 – Fight Club (Fincher 1999)

There is no doubt that Jack is unfulfilled and troubled when he begins to recount the story that leads us to the moment he has a gun in his mouth – the opening shot of the film. Nonetheless, his office job and high-rise condo suggest a time of perceived stability before Tyler appeared, before the issues with Marla, and before he developed insomnia. "The implication here," according to Edwards, "is that office work and consumerism are 'feminised' practices that fail to satisfy the criteria of a successful and fulfilling masculine identity" (2006, 134). This resonates, as Edwards identifies, with Bly's mythopoetic masculinity that pushes men to embrace their warrior brains, which he claims a feminized culture has minimized and repressed – Greven (2009) also sees the film as relating to Bly's mythopoetic masculinity. The urban spaces of the consumerist lifestyles rejected by Tyler lack the wilderness opportunities that Bly encourages, but, more troubling for this denouncing of consumerist masculine subjectivities, is the realization, almost a decade after Bly's *Iron John*, that wilderness retreats have themselves become a commodity. Therefore, Jack and Tyler displace urban spaces with a violent practice that swells within the socio-cultural milieu as fight club members are also police officers, servers, custodians, taxi drivers, office workers, and the like. In essence, the abandoned and decrepit house Jack and Tyler use to build their cult home base is a manufactured wilderness that displaces the urban decay and industrialization as the members cultivate the land with Tyler reminding them that they are "the same decaying organic matter as everything else." However, nature is not heralded as some fountain of masculinity to be consumed and instead violence is the prime method through which masculinity can be reclaimed as a form of displacement. Violence takes shape through forms of displacement because acts of displacing force a substance or a thing from its location and replace it with something else. This something else can take the form of gas flowing from a stove with the pilot light gone out or the blood gushing into a wound. The

film is continuously configured through these displacements and Jack takes careful steps to explain these processes as a means of emphasizing their outcomes as well as the meticulous steps required to produce them. Tyler can be considered to represent an ideal masculinity that Jack seeks to embody, but he is primarily a catalyst for displacement. From his job in the movie theatre where he splices pornographic frames into films or his penchant for making soap from the displaced fat of humans, Tyler drives forms of displacement that give rise to chaos and new arrangements.

What the multiplicity of displacements ignited by Tyler indicate is that violence is integral to displacing and that there are many forms of violence. The splicing of pornographic frames into movies is a visual as well as a possible psychological violence enacted on the audience when a frame from a romantic comedy or children's movie is displaced by an unbidden image. Conversely, the stealing of fat from the liposuction clinic is an unlawful violence, which recovers a substance displaced by medical violence that purged unwanted materiality from bodies. However, it is disturbing that the adherence to a patriarchal hierarchy gives rise to these displacements. The splicing of pornographic frames ties into the domination and objectification of women as well as an obsession with the penis as a mythic source of power. Furthermore, we are told it is the "fat asses" of old women that produces the human fat for Tyler's soap, which is displaced by liposuction when women try to embody ideals set for female bodies within patriarchy – another form of violence. The violence within the film is manifestly an attempt to maintain a patriarchal hierarchy (including the mode of masculinity that supports and is supported by it) that displaces anything perceived to be a threat to the control and power exercised by men. Although the men in the film are framed as victims by this masculine crisis discourse, they only encounter violence as a means to manufacture an authentic masculine

subjectivity according to ideals of masculinity that uphold patriarchy. Jack needs to have his condo destroyed so he can let go of the trappings of consumerism that feminizes men, which Tyler frames as a loss of authenticity when it is in actuality unfolding subjectivities that lack a capacity for violence. And, as Tyler demonstrates repeatedly, violence, or at least the threat of violence, becomes the necessary factor in the maintenance of a patriarchal hierarchy. Not only does this capacity for violence put unrealistic expectations on female bodies, but also it must necessarily displace male bodies to motivate their violence. In turn, this maintains a consistent threat framed as merely an authentic masculinity – the notion that men cannot help but be violent. This is obviously a false construction that is upheld by the antiquated mode of masculinity motivating the violence in the first place.

We see this in other forms of displacement in the film, including Jack's lye burn and the fights in the fight club. The lye burn displaces Jack from his perception that he is special and, to quote Tyler after he stops the chemical burn, "it's only after we've lost everything that we are free to do anything." However, this is clearly a misrepresentation of what the lye burn does because Jack is not free to do anything. Instead, he is living within the strict rules of fight club and project mayhem, which aim at further destruction and violence. The displacement of Jack from his consumerist lifestyle and then from his reliance on meditation and methods of spirituality is an effort to spark and increase his capacity for violence – it should also be noted that Jack's relationship with Marla advances in parallel to his capacity for violence as if the two are intertwined. Finally, the fights are a form of displacement as the bodies of men become shifted, moved, and rearranged by violence. This is evident in the shot of Angel Face (*figure 4.3*) after the fight with Jack where he has teeth missing, his features are swollen, and there is blood gushing from his face. As blood and other bodily fluids as well as bones and organs are displaced

within and outside their bodies, the men of fight club are told they are embracing an authentic masculinity that is characterized as the embracing of violence. However, what this violence perpetuates is a patriarchal hierarchy that sustains a system of aggression and the ever-present threat of violence, which pressures others to conform. It is not feminization which makes men victims or inadequate. Likewise, it is not an urban lifestyle or a penchant for IKEA furniture that makes men victims, impotent, weak, unmanly, or in any way lacking. As a result, these displacements manufacture feelings of failure and powerlessness that arise from the insistence on and this clinging to an antiquated mode of masculinity, which requires that men embrace violence as masculine authenticity. Therefore, when the ideals of this antiquated mode of masculinity defer and deny embodiment, men are led to the conclusion that a lack of violence must be the reason for these feelings because authentic masculinity proves itself through violence. While social justice and feminism drives our socio-cultural milieu towards social, political, and economic equality, the dismantling of patriarchal hierarchy is a necessary outcome. This is not the oppression of men, but rather the displacement of the notion that any subjectivity remains unchanged and unquestioned whether in position of dominance or not, which unfolds through the continuous becoming of existence and the potentialities of life.



figure 4.3 – *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999)

Through masculinities as a form of displacement, Jack is hijacked by the illusions of an antiquated mode of masculinity that sustains patriarchal hierarchy, which is materialized by Tyler. This is a distorted view of reality that illuminates a psychological and personal impact that a toxic mode of masculinity has by restricting and limiting the becoming of an unfolding subjectivity. Similarly, in *Falling Down*, Foster experiences alterations of reality that obscure an inability to control situations and achieve the outcomes he wants as a breakdown of his power and threat against his way of life. However, in both *Falling Down* and *Fight Club*, violence is a response to the structure of a patriarchal hierarchy that seeks a violent masculinity to maintain it. However, in *Fight Club*, masculinities as a form of displacement also illuminate how even ideals of masculinity viewed as more positive – such as consumerist masculinity as nonviolent – also defer and deny embodiment as structures that leave men feeling displaced. By eschewing binaristic logic, my reading comprehends that both sets of ideals cannot be affirmed – because they are structured through displacement – and instead this approach embraces masculinities as a force of becoming that yield to the ongoing transformations of existence rather than trying to

progress or regress according to a transcendent model. Also, the form of *Fight Club* as displacement illuminates how modes of masculinity that support patriarchal hierarchy rely on and motivate male violence, which do not make men victims. Rather, through the maintenance of violence as a threat, the possibility for violence is a dire effort to stop others from redistributing power and control through social justice movements. Furthermore, as the last scene of *Fight Club* expresses (figure 4.4), a heterosexual union manufactured by such processes of violence and a discourse of masculine crisis is not just a union but also the ability to maintain the subordination of female subjectivities within the coordinates set by an antiquated mode of masculinity.



figure 4.4 – *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999)

Deviance: American Beauty (Mendes 1999)

While not as popular a text for discussion as *Fight Club*, *American Beauty* also relates to notions of masculinity in crisis. This occurs through the protagonist, Lester, who struggles to find fulfillment within his suburban lifestyle. "Lester is another 'victim'," states Brian Baker, "of white male dispossession and 'emasculatation' that is common to the 'crisis' texts of the late-1990s"

(2006, 80). Again the refrain of men as victims emerges as a prevalent point within the interpretations of masculine crisis films. However, Baker's interpretation uses Mulvey's theory of the gaze in an overt manner in the attempt to claim *American Beauty* as a progressive exploration of the masculine crisis discourse. For Baker, the film "ultimately offers a spectatorial pleasure which does not ultimately invalidate the male body as a site of desire" (ibid.). By interpreting the representations of the film's male bodies through the external site of spectatorship, Baker is able to claim that *American Beauty* counters structures of popular cinema that prevent the male body from being an object of the gaze. This outcome, in Baker's interpretation, is tied to a transformation in the overarching ideology of the gaze, which Mulvey reads as voyeuristic. However, Baker draws on Foucault's conceptualization of surveillance and the panopticon to outline how the ideology of the gaze is changed within a socio-cultural milieu, which is more concerned with a uniform disciplining of bodies rather than a hierarchal distribution that objectifies feminine bodies and not masculine bodies. "*American Beauty* corresponds to a realignment of the scopic or visual economy in contemporary society," argues Baker, "one which now corresponds not to the principles of voyeurism, and so constitutes a gendered gaze, but to the principles of ubiquitous surveillance" (ibid.). In effect, Baker pushes Mulvey's theory of the gaze into a regression that returns to the universal spectator by claiming *American Beauty* is able to un-gender the practice of looking. While he is trying to argue for a less heteronormative ideology of the gaze, this effort to dismantle the gendered practice of looking effectively reverts to re-establishing the unmarked subject as possessing the gaze that Mulvey and decades of feminist theory have worked to undo. Even if it is unintentional, it is difficult to understand Baker's claims as anything but amounting to the notion that all bodies are capable of being looked at and spectators all occupy the exact same position of looking.

Baker's interpretation is built on Lester as a representation that disavows the traditional sites of masculinity as structured within Mulvey's theory of the gaze. This arises through his denouncing of his corporate job, his smoking marijuana in an attempt to rekindle his youth, and his efforts to improve his self-appearance. For example, because Lester wants to improve his physical appearance, Baker argues, "there is an acceptance of the desiring gaze playing upon the male body. The male here does not look, but is the object of the look" (ibid. 82). While this is certainly the case at points in the film when Ricky spies on Lester with a video camera – an act that is clearly marked by the film as non-sexual, despite any misreading a spectator or Ricky's father Fitts may have – there are an overwhelming number of examples where Lester occupies a voyeuristic position from which he gazes at Jane's (his daughter) friend Angela. Furthermore, through the use of explicit sequences that visualize Lester's fantasies about Angela in addition to these other scenes of looking at her, there appears to be a clear indication of a visual pattern that would suture a spectator into Mulvey's male gaze. Baker appears to entirely ignore these scenes and instead he relies on Ricky's use of a video camera as signifying a change in the ideology of the look. "Ricky's look in *American Beauty* is not one of voyeurism," argues Baker, "but one of surveillance; he does not generate the gaze, but channels the panoptic gaze that surrounds and interpellates himself and all the characters" (ibid.). He continues to explain this change through practices of spectatorship that are influenced by the availability of different viewing experiences offered by the Internet and reality television, which Baker sees as causing a reevaluation of the gendered order. Although there are some interesting points raised by this analysis, the core notion of an un-gendered look appears flawed given the tremendous focus the film puts on Angela as an object of the gaze that adheres to Mulvey's theory, and the lack of images that objectify Lester or any other male character in such an overt and visually stylized manner.

Furthermore, this interpretation that relies on representations of masculine and feminine bodies positions the meaning of the film within the external site of spectatorship and offers little discussion of the cinematic meaning that emerges within the film itself. Instead, Baker offers a flawed reading of the film as signifying the changing nature of visual ideology, which is predicated on the notion that a masculine crisis contributes to this development in combination with different media technologies. Rather than situating my claims within the position of an external spectator or within the influence new media may have, my close reading of the cinematic form of *American Beauty* argues that masculinities are a form of deviance, which recognizes the dynamic processes through which the film takes shape.

Masculinities as a form of deviance is structured by the narrative as well as the style of *American Beauty*, which affect and are affected by the continuous departing from standards and norms that unfold throughout the film. This form is manifest in the opening sequence – which is marked as grainy video footage – when Jane, the daughter of the protagonist, Lester, discusses her father's behaviour. She then wishes for his death and an unseen neighbor, Ricky, who is operating the video camera, offers to kill him and she accepts. As the film unfolds, the video footage becomes itself a form of deviance because Ricky is obsessed with cameras and filming people, especially unaware neighbors. Beyond the fact that plotting the death of a parent is not standard practice, to say the least, the form generated by the video footage is itself deviant by way of the place it holds in the relationship between Ricky and Jane, two young people set against the strict expectations of their parents – especially Ricky's father and Jane's mother. This use of video footage also illuminates a deviation from the digitized, high definition images throughout the rest of the film. The film continues to take shape through deviance as the next scene demonstrates through Lester's masturbating in the shower – an act his wife Carolyn marks

as deviant later in the film – as well as a number of shots that deviate from a focus on the characters in unmotivated departures, such as a shot of Lester being driven to work by Carolyn (*figure 4.5*) that cuts to a prolonged shot of the sky (*figure 4.6*). Clearly, Lester is sleeping in this moment and the cut to the sky is not attributed to any character within the vehicle. Hence, the shot exists as an unmotivated and unexplained image of the film's diegetic space. In other instances, such as the shots of a plastic bag caught in the wind, the film will depart from human figures without an obvious motivation for this divergence.



figure 4.5 – American Beauty (Mendes 1999)



figure 4.6 – *American Beauty* (Mendes 1999)

Furthermore, Lester himself is a form of deviance as a character because he embraces his oddities in a way that separates him from the other masculine crisis film protagonists who rely on more obvious violent acts as responses to their failure. Even Bordwell points out that the film deviates from the usual protagonist with "forgivable flaws" and instead offers "an adman who retreats into fantasy when he loses his job" (2006, 83). Whether or not one agrees with Bordwell's claim that Lester does not have forgivable flaws, the narrative is structured through this deviance because there is no union or reunion of heterosexual romance for the main character, as there is in *Fight Club* or in *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Tombstone* as discussed in Chapter Three. The film also deviates from the male melodramas of the 1950s, such as *Bigger Than Life* and *The Man With the Gray Flannel Suit*, because following Lester's crisis there is no hollow final image of him and Carolyn reconciling their differences. Despite these deviations, the ending does align with the death of the male that occurs in Sirk's male melodramas, which throws the life of the woman – Carolyn – into further chaos. In addition, the film intersects with film noir through Lester's pronouncement of his coming death – he states, "in less than a year" –

at the beginning of the film. This recalls the tendency of film noir to begin with the protagonist's death or pronounced death before flashing back through the events leading up to his murder – for example, in *The Killers* (Siodmak 1946), *Sunset Blvd.* (Wilder 1950), *D.O.A.* (Maté 1950), among others. In this way, the film is configured by a tension constantly pushing back on deviation that recalls Deleuze and Guattari's claim that there are always structures that attempt to re-stratify. Therefore, as much as Lester's masculinity takes shape as a form of deviation, there are also a number of forces that try to force him back within the parameters of acceptable behaviour – including Carolyn and Jane as well as his superiors at work. Although, as the film advances through these structures of deviance and the tensions that arise from the deviant, it becomes apparent that even those people that appear to model standard behaviour – especially, Carolyn and Fitts – are actually engaging in their own deviant behaviour, or at least expressing a desire to do so.

American Beauty tends to be read alongside other films, especially *Fight Club* and *American Psycho*, as being about a masculine crisis. Gates sees a relation between *Fight Club*, *American Psycho*, and *American Beauty*, "in a rejection of contemporary society, Lester (Kevin Spacey) drops out, smokes dope, and tries to seduce a high school cheerleader" (2006, 47). However, unlike *Fight Club*, as discussed previously, there is a lack of overt physical violence other than the murder at the end of the film. For Edwards, in comparison to *Fight Club* and *American Psycho*, which "both tend to offer negative, even nihilistic, views on the perceived crisis of masculinity and the descent of their (anti)heroes into social and self-destruction," *American Beauty* "offers a somewhat more positive view, and indeed outcome" (2006, 135). It is unclear what exactly motivates Edwards to make this claim. However, it is possible that he reads Lester's deviation from the caustic violence of these two other films as a positive because Lester

merely resorts to a type of adolescent or teenage male behaviour – what we may deem immature. This behaviour, in comparison, is visibly less violent than the choices made by Jack, Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho*, or even Foster in *Falling Down*. However, Lester does cause psychological and emotional violence to be inflicted on his family and acquaintances – especially, Carolyn, Jane, and the neighbors, even if most of the Fitts family issues are misconceptions. Therefore, Edwards' claim, "Lester's death is the only true scene of violence in the film and this is hardly self-inflicted" (ibid. 137), overlooks how Lester's deviation affects and is affected by his family and neighbors. Moreover, even though physical violence is not the solution Lester seeks, his deviation is not a practice of mere tomfoolery. Lester's initial deviation from socio-cultural norms launches a series of departures from standard behaviours, which hurt many people and produce a toxic environment in which he cannot survive.

Even though Lester does not use physical violence, his death is not the only true scene of violence in the film. In addition to Lester's murder by Colonel Fitts, there is a series of violent scenes that include Fitts' beating of his son Ricky on multiple occasions whenever he perceives that his son has done something deviant – like videotaping a willing and naked Jane through her window as well as when Fitts assumes Ricky is having a homosexual affair with Lester. This is clearly an oversight in Edwards' reading, but something that should not be ignored because Fitts' violence aligns him with other characters experiencing a masculine crisis – such as in *Fight Club* or *Falling Down*. Specifically, for Fitts, deviations are a form that must be responded to with violence, which is in itself a departure from standard, contemporary parenting practices in America – or least officially in terms of law. Moreover, masculinities as a form of deviance take shape through Fitts' response to Ricky and Lester's response to Jane, or lack thereof, which deviate from one another as well as the expectations for fathers. Which is to say, both of their

configurations as father deviate from one another and they both depart from the standard expectations and norms. When faced with the transformations of a socio-cultural milieu that is dismantling the role of the patriarchal father, both Fitts and Lester find dissatisfaction given their loss of control and seek to regain this position through separate methods. For Colonel Fitts, this involves the threat and use of violence, which, as we have seen through *Falling Down* and *Fight Club*, is a means to maintain patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege as the mode of masculinity that supports and is supported by it.

While Lester's approach is much more of a deviation from this repeated threat of violence that occurs in other masculine crisis films, it is still a mode of violence. "Though not so much a crisis of masculinity as a more generic mid-life crisis," states Edwards in relation to Lester's struggles, "it is still clearly resolved through his return to earlier, sensual and less materialist values" (ibid. 137). While there is merit to Edwards' claim, in relation to the other masculine crisis films, it is apparent that Lester is experiencing similar dissatisfaction and precipitating anger stemming from a perceived loss of control and power. This experience may be compounded by a mid-life crisis, but, nonetheless, Lester reacts negatively toward Carolyn and Jane in an attempt to take a stand that re-asserts his masculinity that aligns with an antiquated mode of masculinity. Lester's threat of violence is dissipated by his recreational use of marijuana – perhaps a medication that should be thoroughly explored to counter any feeling of masculine crisis – but it is still an existing threat, at least momentarily, that impacts both Carolyn and Jane. His violence is a shock for his family precisely because it is a deviation from his normal behaviour, which has been a sedated and passive acceptance of his lack of power within the familial structure. Therefore, Lester's period of stability that precedes his crisis is also itself a form of deviation from patriarchal expectations of masculinities because it was a passive

acceptance of powerlessness – as opposed to a position of control – with which he is suddenly dissatisfied. Masculinities as a form of deviation take shape through Lester's actions, like his tossing of a platter during an argument at dinner, which both shocks his family and signals a threat of potential future violence.

It is rather difficult to ignore this violence within the film, in addition to the assault of Ricky by his father, because it functions as a means to maintain or an attempt to reassert a patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege. While Carolyn may be able to overcome the initial shock of Lester's threats through her own form of deviation in an affair, it would be impossible to assume her character does not experience psychological and emotional violence. The impact of this violence is clear in several scenes where she breaks down against the many forces of her family and work life that affect her. In a parallel to the violence perpetrated psychologically by Lester on Carolyn, there is an implicit indication that Colonel Fitts's wife Barbara undergoes extreme emotional and psychological violence. This is visible through her quiet and timid interactions with others, which are completely passive, like when Ricky introduces her to Jane. Therefore, while *American Beauty* may appear to deviate from other masculine crisis films in interpretations like Edwards', there is still plenty of violence and implied threats of violence committed by males within the film, especially the fathers. In response to this patriarchal violence, Carolyn and Barbara also deviate from one another because Carolyn refuses to be marginalized by Lester and seeks out experiences that give her a sense of power – this includes an affair with a colleague as well as buying a gun to shoot.

In relation to Carolyn's time spent at the gun range, the spaces where the film takes shape through deviations are themselves aberrant. From the gun range to the seedy motel where Carolyn meets Buddy for sex as well as the alley in which Lester first smokes marijuana with

Ricky to the garage where he lifts weights and smokes joints, all of these spaces are associated with transgressive behaviors. What become illuminated through the forms of these spaces are the processes that configure these characters seeking out departures from socio-cultural norms. At the same time, rather than these spaces harboring these activities, they empower characters to explore new possibilities and give the characters moments of satisfaction against the pressures to conform, even if these are fleeting. Like the fight club in *Fight Club*, but without the fighting, these spaces provide the characters with momentary glimpses of authenticity to combat previous feelings of failure and inadequacy. Lester is especially empowered by the forms that take shape within these spaces and he often retreats to the garage in particular to pursue his new interests, which includes lifting weights and fantasizing about Angela. Like *Fight Club*, Lester explores alternative experiences through fantasy where he can achieve the ideals of masculinity he seeks to embody. Exclusively, Lester's fantasies involve Angela in explicitly sexual positions (for example, *figures 4.7 and 4.8*). This desire for a sexual relationship with Angela turns into an atypical pursuit, which diverges from acceptable behaviour – both in terms of social practices and the law – because he is a middle-aged man and she is a high school aged girl.



figure 4.7 – *American Beauty* (Mendes 1999)

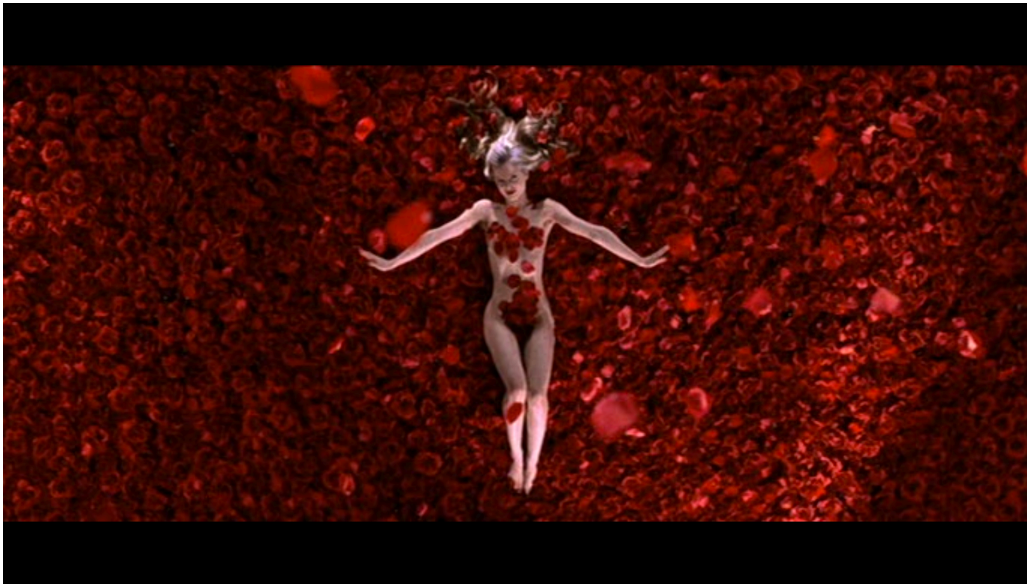


figure 4.8 – *American Beauty* (Mendes 1999)

Lester's interactions with Angela mark another site of violence overlooked by Edwards in the film because, like Jack's fantasies in *Fight Club*, his imagined interactions with Angela have real violent outcomes – given that his advances towards the underage Angela are illegal and abusive as well as having an emotional and psychological impact on Jane. In Bruzzi's view, in comparison to *Happiness* (Solondz 1998), for example, Lester is redeemed "through martyrdom" because he "is shot by his ludicrous caricature of a neighbor Frank Fitts" (2006, 184). Bruzzi claims that his "desire for Angela sits alongside his rebellion against conformity and his desire to recapture his youth" (ibid.). However, this deviation is a physical violation of Angela as a minor that should not be justified in the same way as smoking some marijuana is. To attempt to align this illegal behaviour as simply another deviation is to miss that the film takes shape through the differences of deviant forms. Unless there is a goal of maintaining patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege, it becomes rather impossible to dismiss this act of violence. Furthermore, the act of realizing his fantasy through his deviant behavior with Angela is the process that finally shakes Lester from his transgressive behavior. Upon Angela revealing that this would be her first time

having intercourse, Lester stops molesting her and resumes his role as a parent. It is at this moment, after making Angela a sandwich, that Colonel Fitts enters Lester's home and kills him – motivated in part by the assumed affair he believes his son is having with her as well as Lester's rejection of the Colonel's own sexual advances toward him earlier that night.

Despite their departure from one another in their approach to a masculine crisis, Fitts and Lester do intertwine again. However, this murder does not make a martyr out of Lester, as Bruzzi claims, although as a discourse that attempts to maintain or reassert a patriarchal hierarchy this is a possible way to frame the film. Instead, through masculinities as a form of deviation, there is the capacity to read Lester not as a martyr or even a victim, but as unable to achieve satisfaction through the pursuit of ideals no matter if they are associated with the traditional role of the patriarchal father or some practice of deviation. Fitts also expresses this outcome, but through Lester's rejection of his homosexual advance. "These two fathers," according to Latham Hunter, "both flunking at adult masculinity for different reasons, come together to highlight the central reason behind their failures and demises" (2011, 89-90). For Hunter, this failure and demise occurs because "Fitts's masculinity is empty and repressive: he has worn the mask of homophobic disciplinarian to hide his homosexuality. Lester's masculinity is stunted and regressive, relishing irresponsibility and disconnection" (ibid. 90). While this interpretation highlights the inability to overcome feelings of inadequacy that develop due to the erosion of patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege, her return to a more traditional model of the father as worthwhile can be understood as an attempt to advocate on behalf of the reassertion of these structures. Hunter claims that the end of the film offers "a warning to those who might shun the traditional models of father and breadwinner" (ibid.). By pushing for the defense of the traditional, patriarchal father, Hunter's interpretation aligns with the male melodramas of the

1940s and 1950s that reassert the male authority figure to prevent life from falling into chaos. This interpretation overlooks, in the same way that Edwards overlooks other forms of violence in the film, the capacity to reject the system that fosters such a position of the traditional father and breadwinner to begin with. The deviations of Lester and Fitts that arise from this model are motivated precisely by the shortcomings of patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege to deliver the ideals of power and control amidst the transformations of gender relations. Therefore, a return to this traditional model is precisely what motivates these violent deviations in the first place, which take shape through the film as men in crisis using divergent behaviour in an attempt to regain their position of power, or at least come to terms with its regression. Instead, what a close reading of masculinities as a form of deviation in *American Beauty* opens up is the capacity to explore masculine subjectivities unbound by the structures of patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege, which are informed by an antiquated mode of masculinity that only results in feelings of inadequacy and failure. Through the force generated by reading the forms of *American Beauty*, a pathway unfolds for alternative conceptualizations for masculinities that deviate from deviation – not simply departure from ideals as an ideal itself, but the pursuit of becoming as ideal-less. Not only is this the embracing of masculinities as a force of becoming that leaves behind the traditional models of father and breadwinner, but it also abandons the need for ideals and fulfillment according to the structures of patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege.

Reading the cinematic form of the masculine crisis films from the 1990s in relation to the masculine crisis discourse and antiquated modes of masculinity uncovers the processes through which men become framed as victims. Furthermore, by reading for the forms of these films together, it is evident that violence is motivated by the structures of patriarchal hierarchy, which gives the illusion that violent acts can be used as a means of achieving ideals that defer and deny

embodiment. This motivation breeds a distorted view of reality that obscures the ability of men to perceive the promises of patriarchal hierarchy (including the mode of masculinity that supports and is supported by it) and male privilege as themselves unachievable. Instead, women and minorities as well as socio-cultural and political systems become the targets of men that are attempting to reassert their power and control. Through relations with the male melodramas and film noirs of the 1940s and 1950s, the masculine crisis film can be read as a film cycle that engages with masculine crisis discourse as a notion which perpetuates the sense that men are experiencing instability and inadequacy due to their position as victims amid transformations of gender relations. Rather than disseminating this illogical claim – men cannot be the victims of a redistribution of power and control through which they have historically oppressed others – the cinematic form opens up a capacity to map alternatives where masculine subjectivities can be experienced through community and a shared sense of vulnerability as opposed to the maintenance of power through the threat of violence. This is revealed to be a generative mode of becoming as it launches masculine subjectivities beyond the pursuit of harmful and toxic ideals that not only leave a man with feelings of failure and inadequacy through the continuous deferring and denying of embodiment, but are also destructive of men themselves.

- CONCLUSION -

The Return of the War Film: Masculinities as a Force of Not Yet

"Young American GIs advancing to dangerous battlefield positions used the most eloquent expression: 'We're off to the movies'"

- Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, 62

Masculinities in Saving Private Ryan (Spielberg 1998) and The Thin Red Line (Malick 1998)

Until the appearance of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*, the 1990s was a decade of few notable war films. The beginning of the decade was a boom for the Western film, as I explored in Chapter Three, and the war films produced during the early and mid-1990s were not of the traditional combat film. Jeanine Basinger notes only a few minor combat films from 1990 to 1997 in which each year sees one or no films that fit her definition of the genre (Basinger 2003). Significant war-related films from this period include a court room drama in *A Few Good Men* (Reiner 1992), a film about the American civil war in *Gettysburg* (Maxwell 1993), a comedy about Operation Desert Storm in *In the Army Now* (Petrie Jr. 1994), and a drama with detective elements in *Courage Under Fire* (Zwick 1996). However, the absence of the war film changes in 1998 with the blockbuster *Saving Private Ryan*, which launched the war film back into prominence and led to an increased production of war films into the millennium and to the present day. War films continue to appear, especially in relation to more recent wars fought by the United States, most notably *Jarhead* (Mendes 2005), *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow 2008), *Lone Survivor* (Berg 2013), *American Sniper* (Eastwood 2014), *Fury* (Ayer 2014), *13 Hours* (Bay 2016), and *Dunkirk* (Nolan 2017). In terms of masculinities, the reemergence of the war film genre comes after a near decade of masculine crisis discourse in the wake of Susan Faludi's *Backlash* and Robert Bly's *Iron John*. The cycle of Western films that appeared in the early 1990s had long since faded and

the masculine crisis film became increasingly violent. Without the fantasy space of the frontier to regenerate masculinity and the wilderness seeming ever farther away from the urban sprawl, the war film becomes a beacon for heroic masculinity that can possibly remedy the feelings of failure and inadequacy produced by ideals within the structures of patriarchal hierarchy (including the mode of masculinity that supports and is supported by it) and male privilege against transforming gender relations.

Saving Private Ryan was released in the summer of 1998, and it was tremendously successful. The film was lauded for its realism and visual effects (Eberwein, 2010, 58-60), which revived the genre as spectacle capable of seizing the attention of audiences alongside science fiction, fantasy, and action films. At this time in the late 1990s, the masculine crisis discourse was still powerful and influencing many men to see themselves as victims in need of violent outlets to reassert their masculinity. According to Kimmel, "the turn of the twenty-first century found American men increasingly anxious; men feel their ability to prove manhood threatened by industrialization and deindustrialization, immigration and a perceived invasion" (2006, 216). With few available opportunities to prove their manhood, in accordance with an antiquated mode of masculinity – perhaps other than unsanctioned extreme violent outbursts – war, and especially the fantasy of combat manufactured by war media, provide men with possibilities to reassert an archaic manhood and cling to its ideals. Within the United States, this period is also saturated in insecurity given the socio-cultural transformations, the emergence of globalization, increasing foreign and domestic terrorism, a declining industry sector, and a technological saturation that seems to know no boundaries. "Thus at a time of national uncertainty," states Eberwein, "we have a war film that champions the heroic values associated with World War II, using one of American's [sic.] most popular actors playing a strong, unambiguously moral leader whose

sacrifice guarantees the continuity of American values" (ibid. 62). Morality is particularly important to the cycle of war films that followed in the wake of *Saving Private Ryan*, according to Gates (2005, 298), and she sees these films as comprising a new war film cycle, which includes *Three Kings* (Russell 1999), *Tigerland* (Schumacher 2000), *Behind Enemy Lines* (Moore 2001), *Pearl Harbor* (Bay 2001), *Enemy at the Gates* (Annaud 2001), *Windtalkers* (Woo 2002), *Black Hawk Down* (Scott 2001), *Hart's War* (Hoblit 2002), *We Were Soldiers* (Wallace 2002), and *Tears of the Sun* (Fuqua 2003).

Gates argues that this new war film cycle, in a foregrounding of idealistic morality, is separate from previous cycles in the genre. "The new Hollywood war film," argues Gates, "sees a shift from the war films of the 1980s in terms of the representation of heroism – from hypermasculine heroes to idealistic ones" (2005, 298). Where the hard bodies of actors like Sylvester Stallone and the endless work of grunts characterize the 1980s war film, it is the morality of the young men that distinguish the war films emerging in the late 1990s. Gates, discussing war films from the late 1990s and early 2000s, states, "these films focus on the fact that – whether the conflict itself is right or wrong – the men fighting it are doing so for the right reasons" (ibid. 301). This focus is certainly at odds with war films from the 1980s, many of which questioned the role of the United States in global conflict as well as the turmoil and psychological distress of soldiers – this includes films like *Platoon* (Stone 1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (Kubrick 1987), *Hamburger Hill* (Irvin 1987), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (Stone 1989). "These are not political wars being presented on the screen, but moral ones," asserts Gates of the new cycle of war films that begins in the late 1990s, "and the hero who fights them is the idealistic youth" (ibid.). Morality, then, is of the utmost importance to these films and to the masculinities that form within their images. In the majority of these films, the soldiers are framed

as doing what is good and what is right. This new war film cycle introduces a transcendent value to the actions and roles of the masculinities they represent and express in relation to the ways the war-image is used. By avoiding the political issues that were a central focus in the war films of the 1980s, and instead foregrounding a moral judgment of the soldiers' roles and actions (ibid. 307), the new war film cycle establishes a socio-cultural significance for the genre with a more positive and nationalistic military message.⁴

One might expect that because these masculinities are doing what is supposedly good and right, and given the fact that many of these war-images are viewed as more authentic representations of war due to their realistic visual effects, then the violence the masculinities represented as good and right must be a part of the authentic and essential nature of war, too. "However, while these 'authentic' and 'realistic' combat sequences that define the new Hollywood war film may further the goal of realist combat films of the late 1980s," Gates views this cycle as problematic because "they do not necessarily offer a more *accurate* portrayal of war and most often merely mask increasingly idealistic moral assertions" (ibid. 298). Here Gates is drawing our attention to the fact that the preoccupation with authentic combat sequences often masks the idealistic moral assertions, which contributes to a perception that distorts the relations between masculinities, war, and combat. Like the frontier as a font of masculine authenticity that serves as a foundation for the myth of the self-made man and mythopoetic masculinity, the return of the war film, particularly with an initial focus on World War II and the greatest generation, marks a development in the role of violence within a masculine crisis discourse. In addition to patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege producing the threat of violence, the war film reflects the possibility of harnessing this affinity for violence that arises within the structures of a masculine crisis for

⁴ Note that I have previously discussed this new war film cycle in a work that explores theories of spectatorship and masculinities, and some of the discussion here is developed from that work (McDonald 2015).

nationalistic purposes – something that is prevalent during other periods when the genre thrived. However, this contemporary development marks a dangerous shift from the individual experience of a masculine crisis narrative towards a more unified cohesive movement that seeks to reassert not only patriarchal hierarchy and the mode of masculinity that supports and is supported by it but also a staunch nationalist vision. Given the current trends globally and in North America, especially in the United States, this dangerous shift needs to be confronted and critiqued, but we also need to generate forces that break down these views and rethink masculinities yet to come.

While I do not have the space within this dissertation to engage in a complete analysis of this war film cycle – and many of the films from the cycle fall outside the 1990s – I conclude with an analysis of the forms of masculinities in *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* in order to demonstrate the potential for extending this project across other genres and to gesture towards future research. Such further work might, for example, include an exploration of the bromance and biopics of the 1990s and early 2000s. Specifically, these two films could be understood as two competing modes of filmmaking because Spielberg could be linked to Hollywood and the blockbuster while Malick is influenced by art cinema as defined by Bordwell (2008). However, beyond this type of comparison, the forms of these films generate diverse potentialities for exploring the implications of the new war film cycle for masculine subjectivities. Masculinities are a form of validation in Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, which relates to the moralistic idealism of the cycle it initiated. The film takes shape through processes of validation that configure the possibility that these men are fighting the good fight. From the opening scene of a much older Private Ryan with his large family, the film cuts to the horrific scenes on the beaches of Normandy during the D-Day invasion of the Allied forces. Following

these first two scenes, the images of the family and then the violent spectacle celebrated for its authenticity and realism, the camera moves along the beach to capture the tremendous loss of life. This sequence structures masculinities as a form of validation by continuously returning to the same question: was the sacrifice worth it? Ryan's family, through this process, holds closely together like the soldiers huddled in the landing boats on the way to the beach. These interconnected images emphasize the close bonds – that of family and army – that permeate and validate the sacrifices to follow. Moreover, the innovative visual effects sequence of the beach landing is itself a form of validation because Spielberg and his crew took careful efforts to recreate it accurately. From the blood spatter on the camera lens to the CGI bullets that fly through the image, the visual effects always already validate the film within the genre by creating a war-image that can be understood as authentic (Eberwein 2010).

The narrative unfolds through validation as a debate is waged among the soldiers about whether or not they support the value of their mission. There are also large discussions inferred by the meetings of officials and there are many shots that mark the extreme loss of life that occurs in war. All of these processes circle around the question: can saving Private Ryan be validated? Throughout the film, masculinities are a form of validation within individual scenes amidst this larger narrative focus. From the shooting of surrendering German soldiers after the United States army successfully captures the target at the beach landing to Private Caparzo's rescue of a small girl from a family in the ruins to Medic Wade's questioning of why he ignored his mother as a child to Private Jackson's prayers before each kill, the masculinities of the soldiers take shape through a seeking of validation that configures their ability to achieve something worth justifying as right and good. In the conclusion of each of these episodes, whether it is Caparzo's death, which leads a fellow soldier to reinscribe the letter to his father

that got blood on it, or Wade's death, which leads his fellow soldiers to seek to murder one of the captured German soldiers responsible, the men are consistently structured through pursuits of validation. In this manner, the cinematic form of the film is not merely represented as making morally idealistic assertions, but they also take shape through processes of validation within the coordinates of right or wrong, which can be further interrogated to map how ideals of sacrifice, nation, and duty affect and are affected by masculinities.

Conversely, masculinities are a form of disorientation in Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*, which perhaps explains why Gates views the film as the "one exception to this dominant trend" of the moralistic war film of the late 1990s and early 2000s (ibid. 298). Where *Saving Private Ryan* is a linear narrative with a clear development, the narrative of Malick's war film wanders in a tangle of thoughts, images, and emotions that are at times connected but predominantly without any causal links. If Spielberg's war film and the rest of the new cycle function in various ways as an expression of war violence that is morally idealistic and with the purpose of fighting the good fight, the violence in *The Thin Red Line* takes shape without such moral direction. "Like the narration that can go anywhere but never adds up to a final meaning," states Dana Polan, "the field of battle in *The Thin Red Line* is a space of floating, of meaningless violence that can come from anywhere, but also of the effect of just waiting, of living with nonaction" (2006, 60-61). Where the images of soldiers in boats preparing to invade the beach in *Saving Private Ryan* is followed directly by a spectacular combat sequence that is itself a validation of the shots of the soldiers preparing to attack, Malick's film generates similar images of soldiers preparing to invade the beach only to enter a space devoid of enemies. This emptiness after an affective anticipation on behalf of the soldiers leads them to walk around the landing site in a delirium as the images in this sequence range from the soldiers to aspects of their strange

new surroundings without any organizing structure. After they land on the beach, the soldiers walk and walk through the jungle, but unlike the scenes of the soldiers moving through the French countryside in *Saving Private Ryan*, there is no indication of where these soldiers are going – the endpoint is as much a mystery as it is the confused and lost affect struck upon their faces.

While this only serves as an introduction to the potentiality of closely reading for the forms of masculinities in other genres, the forms of *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* map capacities for interrogating the new war film cycle that emerges at the end of the 1990s. Masculinities as a form of validation in Spielberg's film foregrounds the necessary structuring of military violence as a means of corralling masculine subjectivities into combat as well as ensuring their obedience to the mission and the nation. Conversely, masculinities as a form of disorientation in Malick's war film opens up a pathway to reimagine not only the experiences of masculinities in military violence – there is as much an inward destructive force that obliterates any sense of purpose as there is a method for composing it as morally idealistic – but it also illuminates pathways towards rethinking masculinities as interconnected with nature through the images of nonhuman animals and vegetal life that spark vibrant and confusing contrasts to the images of death and annihilation. Given the intricate relations between masculine subjectivities and military combat, there is an opportunity here to pursue further research that uses cinematic form and theories of affect to harness the intensities and relations within these images, as I have done in Chapters Three with the Western film and Four with the masculine crisis film to generate theoretical speculation that unfolds and imagines new conceptualizations of masculinities in relation to the discourses of military masculinity. While war-images continue to express familiar aspects of war – such as being disorientated in combat or using propaganda to support war

efforts – closely reading for the forms of war films can generate forces that de-familiarize these conditions to grasp the relations that structure masculinities through these events and offer new tools for further interrogating military masculinity.

Furthermore, through this discussion of *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*, the potentialities of closely reading for the forms of masculinities in genre films is affirmed as a vibrant process that can open up new thinking generating new conceptualizations of masculinities. By pushing beyond the effect of cinematic affects on a spectator and seeking cinematic meanings rather than socio-cultural meaning, the powers of cinema can be used to unfold the unthought and the not yet. While spectatorship theory and the recognition of representations will no doubt continue to be employed for interpretations of genre films and gender – as it likely should – Brinkema's radical formalism along with my augmentations of this theory generate a complimentary line of thinking that can compose alternative pathways as well as be put into dialogue with to reinforce or challenge established theoretical assumptions.

Furthermore, this dissertation affirms the potential of using film philosophy to interrogate and explore gender in cinema. By using the close reading of cinematic form as a force through which to launch philosophical speculation, the analysis undertaken throughout affirms the relations between continental philosophy and cinema studies. Certainly, there is still much we do not know about cinematic affects and form – as Brinkema gestures towards in the conclusion of *The Forms of the Affects* – but we can confidently profess that forms and affects unfold a multiplicity of capacities for generating thought. In this dissertation, my readings actualized some of these capacities to fracture and rupture the myths and ideals of an antiquated mode of masculinity, which connects to patriarchal hierarchy and male privilege. This work offers less a set of conclusions and more of a methodology, which comprehends masculinities as dynamic

processes and seeks to challenge discourses and beliefs that foster oppression and inequalities in a move towards creating new modes of masculinities not tied to myths or ideals. In this sense, conceptualizing masculinities as forms reveals a creative force of relations, becomings, and that which is not yet.

It has been a surreal process to complete the writing of this dissertation in the wake of Donald Trump's election, with my final chapters coming together during the atrocious resurgence of white supremacy and neo-Nazism. When I began this project as a vision of exploring a set of films that focused on a crisis of masculinity in the 1990s, I could never have anticipated – nor would I have wanted to imagine – the timeliness and necessity of work that aims to not only fracture, de-center, and disintegrate antiquated modes of masculinity in all manifestations but that also seeks to generate new conceptualizations of masculinities as relations, becomings and the unthought. This project requires modes of masculinities that are not tied to any set of ideals that perpetuates threats and materializations of male violence. While I do not imagine that a film, or cycle of films, will somehow change the world, and while I also know that academic theories are not always applicable to socio-cultural praxis, given the dreadful, hateful, and ignorant views that still pollinate modes of masculinity in our advanced intellectual, technological, and global landscape, I cannot help but advocate for continuous contributions of thinking and knowledge in any form – including cinematic form – to generate new masculinities yet to come.

By rethinking and reimagining masculinities through close readings of masculinities as forms, my project contributes a set of tools and concepts that can be considered in practical studies as well as engaged with in future theoretical contexts. Through my challenge to map how processes mediate masculinities as forms and in relation to affects – as opposed to tracing them as socio-cultural representations – I have demonstrated that the pathway towards the new, the

unthought, and the not yet is never in the existence of what already is. Among the many things we shall write down and promise always to remember in the wake of the Trump presidency – including never underestimate the power of feminism, and vote early and vote often! – it has become apparent that we cannot just use what we know and rely on what exists if we are seeking out forms of joy. Furthermore, it is evident that thinking and connecting with what we already know and what already exists leaves us vulnerable to those who dig incessantly into the past and into the forgotten for ideals that have and will always defer and deny embodiment. Those ideals can appear like a progression to some even if so many of us know them to be regressive. Therefore, not only must we speak on behalf of what we know to be experiences and forms of joy, and not only must we speak for the interconnections that generate joyful relations which allow us all to persevere, but we must also continue to embrace the forces of these forms to unfold the new, the unthought, and the not yet as a force transforming existence.

To return to cinema – which is always, for me, an eternal return – conceptualizing masculinities as forms that take shape through an insistence, following Brinkema, on close reading is radical because it refuses to offer an understanding built on the viewer's cognition, a body's tingling, or a spectator's unconscious because cinematic images are a multiplicity of percepts and affects that can also unfold creation. This involves processes of interpretation and theoretical speculation with the aim of invention as opposed to connection. It will always be important to connect the products of our culture to the socio-political processes that sparked them. However, while this is an historical endeavor that can tell us a lot, it may not always unfold alternatives with the virtual potentiality to manifest beyond the actual. If we want masculinities to change, then tracing myths and ideals is not enough. If a different set of ideals would be satisfactory, then this would have solved the problems that manufacture discourses of

masculine crisis by now. This change requires reimagining not ideals and myths but generating new modes for exploring subjectivities beyond the confines of Humanism and, as I have outlined in my dissertation, a focus on the relations, the becomings, and the new that sustain life and allow it to persevere in all forms.

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